Walter Schwimmer: The European Dream

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What is Europe? Looking at the map, strictly speaking, and from a geographic point of view, it is not a continent at all but a mere peninsula tacked onto Asia, the Western-most outreach of Eurasia, while Japan is the Eastern-most one. Europe has been considered since ancient times a continent with a strong cultural identity, despite its huge variety of nations, languages, features, landscape and religious beliefs. You will find in Europe 49 states, 200 languages, and several religious affiliations: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Jews and even Buddhists; there are Latin, Germanic, Slavic and Ottoman traditions, and others. But for millennia this Europe was far from forming unity and providing peace.

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Talking in Japan about the European dream, I have to start by paying tribute to a brave Japanese woman, Aoyama Mitsuko, who married an Austrian diplomat and nobleman, Heinrich Coudonhove-Calerghi, and followed him to his home country. She became the mother of Richard Coudenhove-Calerghi, who was the man who transferred the 1000-year-old European dream of peace through unity into the Pan-European vision of the unification of Europe. It was a few years after the end of World War I, which started 100 years ago, when Count Richard Coudenhove-Calerghi published his book Pan-Europa and founded the "Pan-Europa-Union." Both events are commonly seen today as the beginning of the European movement.

In this historic context, linking Japan and my home country, Austria, I am pleased and privileged to speak to you about the European dream Dr.. Schwimmer, Dr. Thomas Walsh (UPF International Sec Gen) and Dr. Yong Cheon Song (UPF Japan)and its realization, its values and principles, its successes but also its shortcomings. I would like to thank the organizers for this particular opportunity.

What is Europe? Looking at the map, strictly speaking, and from a geographic point of view, it is not a continent at all but a mere peninsula tacked onto Asia, the Western-most outreach of Eurasia, while Japan is the Eastern-most one. And by the way, the name Europe stems, according to ancient Greek myths, from a princes of Asian origin whom Zeus, the greatest of the Greek gods, carried west. Nevertheless, Europe has been considered since ancient times a continent with a strong cultural identity, despite its huge variety of nations, languages, features, landscape and religious beliefs. You will find in Europe 49 states, 200 languages, and several religious affiliations: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Jews and even Buddhists; there are Latin, Germanic, Slavic and Ottoman traditions, and others.

But for millennia this Europe was far from forming unity and providing peace.

On the contrary, the smallest of all continents has been the scene of many wars, some of them called the "100-Years War" or the "30-Years War." The latter involved most of the European countries and was one of the most destructive armed conflicts in history. Between 1618 and 1648 more than half of the European population died because of direct or indirect consequences of the fighting. In the 20th century this history

of bloody conflicts culminated once again in conflicts which became global: World War I and World War II.

Although another compatriot of mine, the author Ingeborg Bachmann, wrote that history gives lessons all the time but nobody learns them, after World War I, a few visionary people such as Coudenhove-Calerghi were ready to learn the lessons; but there were certainly not enough of them. But during World War II people remembered the visionary ideas and started to prepare for a new Europe after the war.

One courageous step in that direction was made by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. You may know that Churchill used to address his fellow-countrymen weekly during the war, encouraging them to bear the burden of the war and giving hope for the future after the war. In the middle of World War II, in 1943, he surprised his listeners by suggesting that after the war all nations of Europe including the current enemies should form a "Council of Europe" to unite the continent in peace and through cooperation. This was not a mayfly that did not survive the next day. No, Winston Churchill stuck to his vision even after he lost power in Great Britain. In 1946 he spoke to students at Zurich University in Switzerland and reiterated his appeal to create a Council of Europe and give the whole continent a perspective of peace.

The next important step was the Hague Congress of 1948 organized by various European movements including, of course, the Pan-Europa Union of Coudenhove-Calerghi and attended by Winston Churchill, Konrad Adenauer and Francois Mitterrand, among others, who still had a clear vision of a united Europe. Its proposal was equally clear: an assembly of repre-sentatives of national parliaments was to be set up to explore the political and legal implications of a European Union or federation. Although several governments sent their representatives, the Hague Congress was an initiative of a newly formed civil society, an outcry for peace and a clear "Never again" to war and armed conflicts. And this time the outcry of the people of Europe was heard.

On May 5, 1949, ten Western European democracies created at St. James's Palace in London the Council of Europe, the first intergovernmental institution of European unification. Richard Coudenhove-Calerghi's and Winston Churchill's dreams came true. Partly true, I have to add or admit.

In the aftermath of the horrors of World War II, the main concern of the founding fathers of the Council of Europe was to create an organization that would ensure lasting peaceful cooperation between all European nations. Unfortunately, the post-war period in Europe was also marked by the political and material division of Europe with the emergence of the Iron Curtain. The division, which has had a deep and traumatic impact on Europe, was characterized by an ideological confrontation between two political systems. Europe was breathing, to quote Pope John Paul II, with only one lung. The result was that the Council of Europe remained an essentially western European organization until the gradual dismantling of the regimes in central and eastern Europe which were based on different political structures and values. This process started in 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down. The Council of Europe counted at this stage 23 member states; the last one to join before the fall of the Berlin Wall was Finland. The accession of Finland, which had special relations with the Soviet Union, was already a product of Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of perestroika.

I do not need to remind you of the dramatic political changes which swept through Europe 25 years ago. The Council of Europe was able to react to these changes very rapidly and in November 1990 welcomed the first member state from central Europe, Hungary.

Seven years later, on the occasion of the second summit of the Council of Europe in October 1997, 43 European heads of state and government gathered together in Strasbourg, representing 40 member states and three applicant states. The Palais de l'Europe became at that moment the de facto "Common European Home" mentioned by President Gorbachev, when he addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in July 1989, five months before the fall of the Berlin Wall. When I left the Council of Europe, there were 45 member countries; the accession of the principality of Monaco was already prepared, and after the peaceful separation of Serbia and Montenegro, the latter was admitted as the Council's 47th member state.

There is one blank spot on the pan-European geographical map: Belarus. Even though the political situation in that country is not very encouraging, the Council of Europe keeps in contact with democratic forces, and in particular with civil society. Our Parliamentary Assembly maintains a critical dialogue on the interparliamentary level. After the necessary changes have taken place, no one should be excluded from a Pan-European area of democratic security.

Four non-European states have observer status at the Council of Europe, expressing thereby their interest in the work of the Council and also their ties with the European spirit and culture. These are the USA, Canada, Mexico and Japan. But I would like to also report that relations between the Council of Europe and China have evolved in recent years in a positive way. Both sides have paid high-level visits to each other. These exchanges have allowed for discussions on current political issues of common concern. They also have paved the way for increased cooperation, in particular in such areas as education, health, youth

and sport. The Council of Europe may contribute further to China's efforts to carry out reforms in these and other areas.

Allow me to set out briefly what the Council of Europe stands for. Its main aim is to promote greater European unity through cooperation in a wide range of fields on the basis of shared principles of pluralist democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Our organization, the oldest political European institution, first and foremost represents the Europe of shared values.

One of the Council of Europe's outstanding achievements is the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. It is unique in providing individuals access to a supranational judicial body, the European Court of Human Rights, whose judgments are binding on 47 member states; 800 million Europeans from Reykjavik to Vladivostok are now protected by this convention, which guarantees a number of fundamental freedoms such as the right to life, the prohibition of torture, freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

This unique regional human rights protection mechanism is complemented by several other Council of Europe legal instruments, of which I will give a few examples:

Firstly, the European Social Charter provides member states with the opportunity to commit themselves to protecting a considerable range of economic and social rights for their citizens. The rights guaranteed by the charter can be divided into two categories: conditions of employment and social protection.

I will single out two other major instruments of the Council of Europe in the protection of human rights: the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The Convention for the Prevention of Torture aims at strengthening the protection of detainees against torture or degrading treatment or punishment. Protecting national minorities has become one of the most serious and pressing issues in Europe today.

Ethnic and racial tensions, simmering over the years, have resurfaced, often in acute form and even as armed conflict, as the recent tragedies in southeast Europe have shown. The Council of Europe has sought to tackle these issues at both political and legal levels. A program of confidence-building measures has been established at the grass-root level, intended to launch preventive initiatives in order to defuse tensions before they become serious conflicts. The number of different projects is constantly increasing.

At a legal level, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is the first-ever legally binding multilateral instrument devoted to the protection of national minorities in general, and it contains provisions laying down principles covering a wide range of areas, such as access to the media and participation in public life.

To date, the Council of Europe has adopted more than 200 conventions as well as over 1000 recommendations to governments covering major issues facing European society. In addition to human rights, these instruments cover such areas as social protection, health, education, culture and organized crime and corruption. They form a corpus of harmonized law and procedures necessary to create a united Europe.

The Council of Europe not only sets standards but also monitors the compliance with these standards by member states. In case of non-compliance, the Council can offer assistance in order to remedy the situation. In case of persistent failure to comply, sanctions may be imposed, and ultimately a state may be expelled from the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe takes great pride in having succeeded in making Europe a death-penalty free zone. We are strongly convinced that this punishment has no place in a civilized society. We, therefore, strongly encourage all countries to follow our example, and, together with the European Union, we are promoting a universal ban.

While it is clear that the council's role in the protection of human rights is manifold and it would hardly be possible to give an exhaustive picture, I would like to draw your special attention to the council's action against racism, xenophobia and intolerance and to our work to promote equality between women and men.

In brief, through its standard-setting and democracy-building activities, the Council of Europe is making a major contribution to long-term conflict prevention in Europe. I will not need to convince you that such conflict prevention is at an infinitely lower cost than conflict resolution. If other organizations are sometimes called upon to act as a fire brigade, the Council of Europe can be considered the fire prevention system.

Now you may be confused when I was speaking mainly about an institution called the Council of Europe while most of the time "Europe" – between quotation marks – is used as a synonym for the European Union. And I admit that it is not easy, even for Europeans, to distinguish the two institutions and their respective bodies. I can tell you a short anecdote to comfort you when you have difficulties understanding the different names and symbols.

I once gave an interview to an Associated Press journalist who wanted to talk to me about the euro; it has no direct connection with the Council of Europe, of course, but is a monetary union within the EU. Anyway, he wanted to know what I thought about the euro and European identity. We had a very good talk. When he got up to go, he said to me: "And now, just tell me one thing: what is the EU flag doing there behind you – here, at the Council of Europe?"

So I had to explain to him that the famous blue flag with the 12 golden stars was the Council of Europe flag, and that – since there was, and should be, only one Europe – the EU was allowed to use it too, just as there is only one European Anthem, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," arranged by another Austrian, Herbert von Karajan. This is the official European Anthem. It was introduced at the Council of Europe and, as a matter of course, the EU uses it too. And to drive the point home, I was able to tell him that one of my first official actions as Secretary General of the Council of Europe was to write to Wim Duisenberg, giving the European Central Bank formal permission to use the Council of Europe flag on the euro banknotes – though I cannot say whether knowing that I had a small hand in their design makes it easier, or harder, for me to spend them.

I have been accustomed to say that the common home of Europe has many constructors but no architect and lacks of a single construction plan. So it happened that in 1950, while we were still in the aftermath of World War II, two leading French politicians who truly deserve the title of statesmen, Jean Monet and Robert Schuman, developed an idea how to make war between the main enemies of the past, France and Germany, impossible for the future. The idea was to administer the main resources for conventional wars - the ingredients for armament and ammunition, coal and steel – not on the national level but on a supranational level. It was the year of starting supranational instruments. Another one was the European Convention of Human Rights, one of the greatest achievements of the Council of Europe, which created the European Court of Human Rights, accessible for everybody within the council's territory to protest violations of fundamental rights by national authorities.

Monet and Schuman proposed that the Council of Europe should establish a High Authority administration and control coal and steel in the member states. Not all the members were in favor; in particular, the United Kingdom hesitated to give up its national sovereignty in this area. Therefore, Monet and Schuman had to pursue their idea outside the Council. They found in Germany's chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Italy's Prime Minister Alcide Degasperi congenial partners, and so France, Germany, Italy and the three Benelux states (Belgium, Luxembourg and Netherlands) created the European Community of Coal and Steel.

It was a small community of six members with a very limited, although important mandate.

Six years later the original six created with the Treaty of Rome the "European Economic Community" with the goal of the famous four freedoms - people, goods, services and capital – being able to move freely across national borders within a "Common Market."

It took 16 years after EEC was created for its first enlargement, from six to nine members, to take place in 1973, with Denmark, Ireland and the UK as new members. This was not only an enlargement but also, in my view, a change of paradigms. Since then, there has always been a struggle for priorities, strengthening internal integration versus enlargement, and difficult debates on structural reforms.

It was only in 1986, after near 30 years of existence of the EEC, when the Single European Act (SEA) was the first treaty to amend the Treaty of Rome. The SEA completed the internal market by unifying market regulations; it also reformed the structures and decision-making processes in the EEC. The SEA was preceded by the first draft of a treaty establishing the European Union – but it was obviously still too early.

1986 brought two more members to the European Communities, Spain and Portugal, who joined only ten years after the fall of the dictatorship on the Iberian Peninsula, and together with the previously admitted Greece, the EC now had 12 members.

It was the well-known Treaty of Maastricht of 1992 that brought the three communities (EEC, Euratom and the still-existing European Community for Steel and Coal) under one umbrella, the European Union. The Maastricht Treaty also gave to the European Parliament so-called co-decision powers; until then, the European Parliament was more a consultative body.

When three neutral countries, Austria, Finland and Sweden, acceded to the EU in 1995, this was only possible in the new European political landscape after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Until then, with the exception of Ireland, only NATO members were also EU members.

The “Big Bang” happened in 2004 with the admission of ten new member countries, including three former Soviet republics, the Baltic States, and five countries of the former Communist bloc. Three years later Bulgaria and Romania followed.

Since Maastricht (1992), the union also had the ambition of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and particularly, in recent years, the Common Security and Defense Policy (although this has to allow for the special traditions of the neutral countries of Finland, Ireland, Austria and Sweden, and is not wholeheartedly accepted in Denmark). Now that the Western European Union (WEU) - a defense organization whose membership did not include all the EU countries – was incorporated into the EU, the picture is even more complex. Increasingly, the EU recalls the polycentric model, or a la carte Europe, with everyone free to construct his own menu - an impression strengthened by the Schengen Agreement.

This agreement covers the removal of passport (and customs) for-malities on internal frontiers. Nothing symbolizes the European unification better than the Schengen agreement in connection with the single currency, the euro. I was a boy of 12 years when I made my first trip abroad, a small one of course. It took me to a German island town in the Lake of Constance. In 1954, Austria was still occupied by the four Allied Power of World War II, and so this 12-year-old boy, his brother and his parents needed permission from the French Army to make this boat trip of half an hour. Today I go from Austria through Germany to France without any border control, and I make all payments with the same money.

But I admit that both the Schengen Treaty and the single currency make it more complicated to understand the state of European integration, and are not, in particular in regards to the euro, without difficulties. Switzerland and Liechtenstein are not members of EU but belong (like the non-EU countries of the Nordic Union, Iceland and Norway) to the Schengen area. It represents a notable surrender of sovereignty, even though it does not apply to the whole community.

This is also true of the European Economic and Currency Union (EECU), and particularly the euro, which Denmark, Britain and Sweden still remain outside. This special form of cooperation constitutes the nucleus of a virtual European federation and the innermost circle in our concentric model. Monetary policy is profoundly political, and monetary sovereignty is a 'sacrosanct' aspect of state sovereignty. Therefore, it is certainly a no-go for the traditionally Euro-skeptic British. Some may ask whether Denmark, Sweden and UK might been correct in rejecting the euro when everybody is talking about a euro crisis.

The creators of the euro were very courageous in establishing one currency for very different states. They were not courageous enough to accompany the single currency with a common fiscal and economic policy, and in giving in to the large players they did not implement sanctions against those who ignored budgetary discipline. The result was very visible, not only in Greece. But it is not a euro crisis; it is a debt crisis of undisciplined countries in the eurozone. And the crisis is also fueled by speculators who want to earn high interest rates because of risks they reject bearing. I am not an expert in currencies, but I can still see that the exchange rate of the euro does not indicate that it has become a weak and volatile currency. If I would ask the export companies in my home country, they would certainly like to see the euro a bit weaker….

This is a mere sketch and not a full picture of the various forms which the European union can take. Between the innermost (EU) and outer-most (Council of Europe) circles, there are many different types of ad hoc and regional cooperation (free electrons provide a good simile) and transcontinental cooperation as well. 'Alphabet soup' is the perfect term for the proliferating acronyms. The 'ingredients' include: the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) with Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzer-land; the European Economic Area (EEA) composed of the EU and the EFTA countries minus Switzerland; the Visegrad Group and the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA), which brings together the non-EU-members from SEE including Moldova.

And I should not forget other organizations that extend the geographic area of Europe, such as a very different institution, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In spite of its name, this is not an inter-national organization, since it is not based on an international founding treaty, but it is essentially a standing diplomatic conference. Canada, the USA as well as Central Asian former Soviet republics such as Kazakhstan participate, making it tri-continental. In Europe, it has done partic-ularly useful work on conflict reduction and resolution. Like the Council of Europe, it also sends observers to monitor elections. Its former Secretary General, Jan Kubis, and I have secured an agreement to prevent rivalry and duplication between our organizations and tried to ensure that their work is complementary.

Genuinely international organizations include the transatlantic NATO and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

By taking in new members (Albania, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania) and concluding an agreement, extending beyond the 'partnership for peace,' on cooperation with Russia, NATO has finally shaken off its 'west-European' bias.

The OECD, which has members in five continents including Japan, is the market-economy industrial countries' main economic organization and produces analyses and recommendations to help them coordinate their economic policies. The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly acts as its parlia-mentary forum, forming a bridge between the two organizations; the EU as well as the Council of Europe, and also works with the OECD on specific issues, e.g., anti-corruption measures.

One might, therefore, say that Europe's concentric circles are thus sur-rounded by a number of sub-continental and transcontinental institu-tions. This helps to enrich the many blueprints for the common European home but without obscuring the basic structure - harmonious coexistence of the Council of Europe and the European Union and salutary co-operation between them (actually one of the factors which will determine our continent's future).

The fact that the European Union is still sub-continental, with already 28 members and five more official candidates (Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey), makes no difference in the basic plan for the European home, but it does mean reshuffling the rooms. Since 2004, more than half of the Council of Europe's member states have been in the EU, and with three already negotiating and two waiting for negotiations, there is the possibility of two thirds belonging to the Union.

After the failed attempt to reorganize Europe in 1945 and the transition successfully made by the former Soviet peoples in 1989-90, this is the third radical redrawing of the political map of Europe - and a third challenge for Europe as a whole.

The Council of Europe itself was founded in response to the first challenge, as an answer to the horrors of World War II. And it also rose to the second, when 1989-90 brought sweeping changes, and central and eastern Europeans ('We are the people') declared for democracy and human rights and the council moved in to help them.

And now the third challenge is approaching: a Council of Europe in which almost all of Europe is united, and an enlarged, more integrated EU, embarking on a common foreign and security policy, with 'Schengen' frontiers in Finland, the Baltic states, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia. The question is: where do these frontiers leave the dream we dreamed when the Berlin Wall came down - no more walls, no more Iron Curtain, no more dividing lines in Europe?

The Council of Europe is staking everything on a Europe without new dividing lines. I am convinced that the EU, too, cannot - and will not - reject this goal. Indeed, it is already starting to tackle its responsibilities beyond the old and new Schengen frontiers.

Obviously, the EU is also aware of the 'big bang' enlargement's pan-European dimension. Since 2003, as a consequence of the then-decided enlargement, the European Union has developed the European Neighborhood Policy. The objective of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is to share the benefits of the EU’s 2004 enlargement with neighboring countries. It is also designed to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbors. The vision is that of a ring of countries drawn into further integration but without necessarily becoming full members of the European Union. The countries covered include all of the Mediterranean shores of Africa and Asia as well as the European CIS states (with the exception of Russia and Kazakhstan) in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. Russia does not want to be included in the ENP, but there is an interest of Kazakhstan being included, and there are also some important voices within the Union in favor of Kazakh participation.

At this point I have to admit that handling the Ukrainian and Crimean crisis was not a masterpiece of European policy. In my view, the European Union missed using the Council of Europe as a Pan-European political platform, where Ukraine, Russia and all the 28 EU countries are already on board. The union called the Maidan, the square in Kiev where a hundred thousand people gathered, the Euro-Maidan, not seeing that the people in Maidan were mainly protesting against a corrupt leadership and only secondly against the non-signing of the association agreement with the EU by Yanukovich. It ignored some extreme political forces who openly tried to discriminate against the large Russian-speaking portion of Ukraine’s population.

And it did not recognize Russia’s interest as a neighbor, including the special situation of Crimea with a Russian naval base and as a kindred state of the Russian minority. I think that the union has missed the chance to a dialogue with Russia, and now some leaders are wondering why Putin calls Obama and not

Van Rompuy or Barroso. The two neighbors of Ukraine, Russia and the European Union, should have sat down together and sought a solution.

Once again I want to emphasize that there is only one Europe: the continent with its more than 800 million Europeans. Since 1989, the Council of Europe, which was founded 40 years earlier to overcome conflicts, has made it possible for the one Europe, based on common values, to come about. The Council of Europe and European Union are creations of the same dream. Bearing in mind the history of the germ cell of the union, the proposal of Jean Monet in the Council of Europe to create the high authority of coal and steel, one could call the union a kind of illegitimate child of the council, but I prefer the metaphor of brother and sister, the council as the bigger but poorer brother and the union as the smaller but richer sister. Both have a responsibility towards the Europeans, to make the dream of Europe without dividing lines and without armed conflicts come true.

In spite of what remains to be done, I believe that we have taken a great step forward, and with the help of all who believe in the vision of our founding fathers we shall accomplish the vision of a united Europe. A dream of hundreds of European generations is coming true, and I am convinced that such a dream is not restricted to Europe. All mankind has much more in common than what could divide us!