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On European Multiculturalism

Patrice Canivez

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The starting point of this analysis is Charles Taylor's distinction between multiculturalism and interculturalism. The distinction refers to the Canadian context; it reflects the contrast between Anglophone and Francophone Canada. In an article published in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*¹, however, Taylor clarifies the concept of interculturalism and gives it a wider scope, explaining why this concept applies to European countries. I will first discuss this theory (I), pointing out that if the concept of interculturalism is suitable for each or most European countries, it does not apply to the European Union (EU) as such. Considered as a whole, the EU is a multicultural entity. I will then inquire into the specificity of European multiculturalism (II). Such multiculturalism is closely related to the political structure of the EU, which leads me to discuss Habermas' understanding of Europe's constitutional problems (III). It seems that there is a shift in Habermas' position on this matter, witness his current insistence on the concept of transnational democracy (in *Zur Verfassung Europas*²), as opposed to that of a postnational polity (in his writings on the *postnationale Konstellation*³). Finally, I shall suggest that Habermas' position would benefit from the use of the concept of interculturalism as defined by Taylor.

I. Multiculturalism vs. interculturalism (Charles Taylor)

Charles Taylor rejects the opposition that is usually made between multiculturalism and socio-political integration. On the one hand, he criticizes the idea that multiculturalism encourages people, especially (128) immigrants, to retreat into closed cultural communities and thus leads to ghettoization. In his view, the vast majority of immigrants are willing to integrate into the host society. Ghettoization does not result from too much recognition of cultural differences, but from a mix of discrimination and lack of opportunities:

The major motivation of immigrants into rich democracies is to find new opportunities, of work, education, or self-expression, for themselves and especially for their children. If they manage to secure these, they – and even more their children – are happy to integrate into the society. It is only if this hope is frustrated, if the path to more rewarding work and education is blocked, that

¹ See Taylor, Ch., "Interculturalism or Multiculturalism?", in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 2012, 38 (4-5), p. 413-423.

² Habermas, J. (2011), *Zur Verfassung Europas. Ein Essay*, Berlin, Suhrkamp Verlag. English version by Ciaran Cronin (2012), *The Crisis of the European Union: A response*, Cambridge (UK)/Malden (MA, USA).

³ Habermas, J. (1998), *Die postnationale Konstellation. Politische Essays*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag. English Version by Max Pensky (2001), *The Postnational Constellation. Political Essays*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press.

a sense of alienation and hostility to the receiving society can grow, and may even generate a rejection of the mainstream and its ethic⁴.

Thus, when correctly understood, the purpose of multiculturalism is not only the recognition of differences; it is also the achievement of more social integration and equality. In other words, multiculturalism is closely linked to the development of liberal and democratic principles. However, the term “multiculturalism” may be understood in a larger or a more restricted sense. In the wider sense, the word refers to a policy that aims at: a) recognizing cultural differences, and b) facilitating the social and political integration of immigrants. Multiculturalism in the narrow sense of the word is a way of achieving those aims, while interculturalism is another. In fact, what distinguishes multi- and interculturalism is not so much the policies that are pursued. In practical terms, multiculturalism and interculturalism lead to very similar policies. In Canada, for instance, they justify the practice of “reasonable accommodation”, notably in public schools and offices. Therefore, the main difference between the two concepts lies in the “stories” they tell or to which they refer. It lies in the “rhetoric” that puts integration in a certain perspective. One could say that multiculturalism gives greater weight to the recognition of pluralism while interculturalism puts the stress on integration. Behind this apparently merely rhetorical difference, however, there is the contrast between Quebec and the rest of Canada. In Anglophone Canada, the majority of the population has long been of British descent – meaning English, Scottish, Irish. Consequently, there was a correspondence between the dominant culture and the social composition of the citizenry. In Taylor’s terms, there was a strong “anglo-normativity”. However, this is no longer the case. Anglophone Canada is now made up of a plurality of communities among which people of British descent are a minority – approximately a third of the population, according to Taylor. Another factor is the social advance of citizens of non-British origin who have made their way (129) to positions of importance in all walks of life. Consequently, the “anglo-normative identity” is not dominant anymore – or tends to lose its predominance. Of course, this is an English-speaking society, but the English language is a mere vehicle for social integration and political participation. In Quebec, the situation is quite different. Up to 70 percent of the Quebecers are from French descent. And as everybody knows, the policy of Quebec is to preserve a francophone culture that defines the historical identity of the Quebecers.

This sociological and historical background accounts for the distinction between multi- and interculturalism. In Taylor’s view, multiculturalism and interculturalism are two different patterns of cultural relationships. As we have seen, both multiculturalism and interculturalism are ways of accommodating cultural pluralism and facilitating integration. In the case of multiculturalism, however, integration means integration into society. Immigrants must find jobs, develop their life projects, perform their civic duties, etc. The use of a common language – i.e. English – is culturally neutral. It enables people from different backgrounds and communities to interact with each other. In the case of interculturalism, integration does not only mean integration into society. It means integration into a specific culture. Immigrants are not only supposed to play their part in the development of society. They are also supposed to play their part in the preservation and development of the host culture, that is, of the

⁴ Taylor, Ch., *art. cit.*, p. 414.

francophone culture. Here lies the main difference between the “stories” that are told by the two concepts:

The ‘multi’ story decentres the traditional ethno-historical identity and refuses to put any other in its place. All such identities coexist in the society, but none is officialized. The ‘inter’ story starts from the reigning historical identity but sees it evolving in a process in which all citizens, of whatever identity, have a voice, and no-one’s input has a privileged status⁵.

Taylor’s distinction between multi- and interculturalism is at the same time interesting and questionable. Every language carries its own historical heritage. By this I do not mean that any language is in itself the bearer of ethical values, which is obviously not true. I mean that a historical heritage is more or less embedded in the social and cultural institutions – schools, universities, academic curricula, etc. – in which the language is taught and practised. Learning the language in attending these schools and universities, reading the books that make up the classical curriculum, entail a process of acculturation that is not neutral. However, what I am interested in is the fact that Taylor, at the end of the paper he published in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, states that the Quebecker notion of interculturalism might serve as a model for European nation-states. (130) For in the European nation-states, there is a national culture that is the culture of the majority of the population, if not of all. Integration into the host country means integration into the national culture of the country. At the same time, such integration of newcomers is a key factor in the development of the national culture. It encourages the host culture to enlarge its perspectives and open up to new interpretations.

II. *Multiculturalism in Europe*

The distinction between multiculturalism and interculturalism refers to the Canadian context. However, the concept of interculturalism applies also to the European nations, at least to most of them. As Taylor puts it:

The features which make it applicable to Quebec also often apply in Europe. There: (1) many countries have a long-standing historic identity which is still shared by the great majority of their citizens; (2) this identity frequently centres around a language which is not spoken elsewhere, and is under pressure from larger, ‘globalized’ languages; and (3) the same kind of not-fully-structured fears for the future of its culture and way of life may arise there as I noted in Quebec. Points (1) and (2) make the intercultural story a better fit than the multicultural one⁶.

Thus, in Europe as in Quebec, interculturalism could be a way of integrating minorities and newcomers in enabling them to take part in the development of the host society and culture. This supposes that immigrants and/or minority members be treated as equals, that is, as partners in such a development. However, here lies a problem. In most European societies, there is a fear that newcomers might alter the majority culture and way of life, a fear that “they” might change “us”. Or in a more negative way, there is a fear that immigrants do not even want to transform the host culture, but to create their own self-contained communities

⁵ Taylor, Ch., *art. cit.*, p. 418.

⁶ Taylor, Ch., *art. cit.*, p. 420.

within the host society. Hence, the demand that immigrants and minority members adopt the same customs and way of life as “old-stock” nationals. Learning the national language and adopting the same basic ethic are not enough. Immigrants should be “like us”. Assimilation becomes the condition of integration, while policies advocating strict limitation of immigration and the return of immigrants to their countries become popular. Inasmuch as such fears and distrust generate marginalization and make it more difficult for immigrants to access jobs, housing, etc., the result is precisely what should be prevented, that is, a tendency to ghettoization and a resentment towards the host society that, in its turn, fuels the fears and suspicion of the majority. Thus, a sort of vicious circle sets in, **(131)** which in Taylor’s view should and could be reversed. In order to do that, it is necessary to reach out to leaders of the minorities and newcomers, consider them as partners and co-deciders, in a word: implement the intercultural scenario. If successful, the enactment of this scenario can generate a sense of gratitude and a form of patriotism – as may be seen in the USA – among immigrants whose main desire is to integrate into the host society in order to have a better life for themselves and their children.

Taylor’s conception of social integration may seem exaggeratedly optimistic, but it is not. Interculturalism is necessary to overcome fears and mutual distrust. At the same time, however, putting aside such fears and distrust is necessary to bring about interculturalism and make it work. Here again, there is a circle that can either end up in a deadlock, or evolve into a positive process, the overcoming of distrust making interculturalism possible, the successful implementation of interculturalism making it then easier to further reduce mutual distrust. In the following, I will not discuss the chances of such a virtuous circle, which depends on the specific context and the mode of governance of each country. What I am interested in, is the general idea that multiculturalism presupposes a set of common standards that are more or less neutral inasmuch as they do not reflect the predominance of a majority culture, while interculturalism refers to the inner enlargement of a national culture that benefits from the participation, new ideas and interpretations provided by minorities and newcomers – a process, it is worth noting, which already takes place through the succession of generations, each one reinterpreting in its own way the common culture.

Taylor is right in saying that such a way of accommodating pluralism is best suited to most European countries. However, it does not apply to the European Union (EU) as such. In contrast to its member states, the EU is an instance of multiculturalism rather than of interculturalism. This is obvious as regards the use of a common language. The use of English as a common language is neutral in the sense that it is not the language of a dominant nation. We could even experience a very peculiar situation. If the United Kingdom were to opt out of the European Union, the Europeans’ common language would be a foreign tongue for all of them, except the Irish. However, if we want to go deeper into the question, we have to take a closer look at the overall situation. From a purely descriptive point of view, the cultural diversity of Europe is huge. There are 28 member states and roughly 500 million inhabitants in the EU. There are 24 official languages, and many more if we take dialects and regional languages into account. The diversity is also religious. Europe is one of the “meeting points” of the “religions of the Book”: Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, Orthodoxy and the diverse denominations of Protestantism. Paradoxically, the most striking traits of the EU are often overlooked. **(132)** When we think of the EU, for instance, we are mostly focused on the so-called big countries: Germany, France, the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, Italy, Poland and Spain. It is true that if we add up the population of these six countries, it amounts

to more than two-thirds of the European population. However, when considering the European member states, the vast majority of them are small countries. Three quarters of the EU member states have less than 20 million inhabitants. When – and if – the EU becomes politically mature, the question is whether it is going to be a political organisation where a vast majority of small states is led by a minority of larger ones or if this political asymmetry will be offset by different kinds of political alliances between the smaller ones. Apart from the difference in size and population, however, we must take into account the political idiosyncrasies of the EU member states. Of course, they are all supposed to be democratic states, although some of them are dangerously drifting away, like Viktor Orbán's Hungary. But there are huge differences that are inherited from the past. The most obvious difference is that between republics and monarchies. The important symbolic role of historic monarchies in some EU member states suffices to indicate how difficult it is to conceive of a politically integrated European Union. Moreover, there are different types of nation-states in Europe. In Central Europe, the typical nation-state consists of a nation coexisting with its minorities – for instance, the Hungarian minority in Rumania. In Western Europe, such a pattern does not apply. Neither the Scots in the UK nor the Turks in Germany are minorities in the sense the Hungarians are in Rumania. There are also significant differences in the patterns of political integration. There are centralized states like France, federal states like Germany, consociations like Belgium, etc. All these states have distinctive narrative identities. They have a strong sense of their historic identity.

Now, when dealing with the question of a European multiculturalism, we must determine in what sense we speak of multiculturalism. In fact, the word “multiculturalism” applies to the European context in two, maybe three different ways. First, the word refers to the diverse national cultures. Europe is a multicultural society in the sense of a plurality of cultures that coexist on the basis of a common set of values and modes of communication. Second, the word refers to the way each EU member state accommodates its own internal pluralism. Third, there is a sort of multiculturalism that results from the European “endomigration” or internal migration. By that I mean people migrating from one European country to another: Poles settling in the UK, Spaniards migrating to Germany, the particular case of the Roma, etc. This is nothing new: the history of Europe is not only a history of religious, linguistic and political conflicts. It is also a history of constant migrations of people and ideas across the continent.

(133) These three kinds of multiculturalism raise different types of issues. For instance, the way each nation-state accommodates its own cultural pluralism depends on the origin of this pluralism. Some nation-states are constitutively multinational. Some others are multicultural because of a constant flux of immigrants. As Will Kymlicka has shown, the difference between multinational and polyethnic societies⁷ calls for different kinds of solutions. A multinational society is not multicultural in the same way a society of immigrants is. Another type of question is raised by the theologico-political factor. When it comes to multiculturalism, two issues are particularly sensitive: the linguistic and the religious issues. Nowadays, the question of multiculturalism is in large part the question of Islam. It is due to the presence of an important Muslim population in the major European countries. The attitude towards Islam, however, depends on the relationships between the religious and the political in each country. The process of secularization has developed in different ways in each of the

⁷ See Kymlicka W. (1995), *Multicultural Citizenship*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

EU member states. The type of relationship between church and state that prevails in each of them determines their perception of the multicultural issue. Hence the question is: can we conceive of a convergence between the EU member policies as regards the accommodation of religious and linguistic minorities? There must be some kind of unification in the way European states deal with their inner cultural diversity. This requires, for instance, a joint policy with respect to immigration, the rights of minorities, etc.

Finally, the multinational nature of the EU itself is a specific issue. Here, the question arises: is the goal of the EU to preserve the different national cultures, to ensure not only their preservation but also the conditions to enable them to develop? Or, to put it in a more caustic way, must we conceive of the EU as a museum of national cultures? In order to answer the question, we must take up the issue of EU political integration. That is why I would like to make a few comments on Habermas' concept of a European transnational democracy. Habermas' theories on Europe have been intensively discussed. In the following, however, I will focus on the shift from the "postnational" to the "transnational" because such a shift has a bearing on the issue of multiculturalism.

III. *Postnational vs. transnational democracy (Jürgen Habermas)*

Habermas has developed his views on Europe in many texts, articles and conferences over the past twenty years or so. His main views are constant. First, in a globalized world, socio-economic processes cannot be politically controlled (134) and regulated at the level of the nation-state. Such political control requires that the nation-states come together and achieve some sort of supra-national polity. Second, with respect to the European project, this means that the goal of the European Union is not only to secure peace among the European nations. The goal of the Union is, or should be, to make common action possible. Peaceful coexistence is a tremendous achievement of the European Union. What we need now is an EU that enables us to engage in joint political action. Third, the aim of the EU should not be – or should not only be – to become a global player like China or the USA. The achievement of political integration at European level is a first step on the way to cosmopolitanism. Thus the political integration of Europe should serve as a model for the global governance that is needed in a globalized world.

These are Habermas' constant ideas. However, there has been a noticeable evolution in his conception of Europe. At the end of the 1990s, Habermas spoke of the "postnational constellation" and contemplated the prospect of a European Federation. In his view, there was "no structural obstacles to expanding national civic solidarity and welfare-state policies to the scale of a postnational federation"⁸, even though it was obvious that "a constitution for a multinational state on the scale of the European Union cannot simply adopt the model of constitutions of national federations such as the Federal Republic of Germany"⁹. More precisely, two questions had to be asked: first, "whether the European Union can [...] compensate for the lost competencies of the nation-state"; and second, "whether political communities form a collective identity beyond national borders, and thus whether they can meet the legitimacy conditions for a postnational democracy". Habermas insisted that "if these two last questions can't be answered affirmatively, then a Federal States of Europe is

⁸ Habermas, J., *The Postnational Constellation, o. c.*, p. 108.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

ruled out, and with it the basis for any broader hopes”¹⁰. However, Habermas now speaks of a “transnational democracy” and insists that Europe is neither a Federal state nor a Federation of nations. The shift is noticeable when comparing Habermas’ two major writings on the question: *Die postnationale Konstellation*, which dates back to 1998, and *Zur Verfassung Europas*, which was published in 2011.

Let’s examine the use Habermas made of the concept of multiculturalism in the *Postnational Constellation*. Apart from the fact that the nation-state is no match for world markets, he insisted on the growing multiculturalism in the major European nation-states. (135) This he saw as a fact but also as an opportunity. His line of argument was the following. In the 19th and 20th century, the nation-state was the right framework for political action. The national sentiment could be a source of aggressive nationalism, but it was also a sentiment of solidarity among citizens. It enabled citizens to accept solidarity measures between the richer and the poorer. It supported the development of a social security network, of a redistribution of resources, etc. However, the development of national feelings supposed a certain level of cultural homogeneity among citizens. And the point is that such cultural homogeneity is no longer possible. All modern nation-states are more and more internally diversified. Immigration, individualism and the unstoppable flow of information across the globe make for the increasing pluralism of all developed societies. In this respect, Habermas’ view was that a shift from the national to the postnational was necessary to restore the possibility of effective political action. But his idea was also that such a change of paradigm was an opportunity to liberate the citizens’ political participation from the constraints of nation-state politics and the closure of the ethno-national mindset. “Post-national” did not mean that nation-states were not to exist anymore. It was a kind of *Aufhebung* in the Hegelian sense of the word: nation-states were destined to integrate in a more effective and meaningful political organization.

In his most recent texts on Europe, however, Habermas speaks of a transnational democracy. In great part, the use of the word transnational means that the EU is not and should not become a super-state. The experience of the last decade, especially the collapse of the EU Constitutional project in 2005 and the Merkel-Sarkozy condominium, has led Habermas to fear that a supranational Europe would give rise to some sort of “post-democratic” federalism, which is an “executive federalism” (*Exekutivföderalismus*)¹¹. As against such post-democratic super-state, Habermas now advocates the development of a transnational democracy. In order to sustain his view, he invokes different reasons. From a constitutional point of view, for instance, there is a fundamental reason why the EU cannot be a Federal State. Roughly speaking, the reason is that the EU and the member states share the sovereignty. Between the EU and the member states, there is a complex relationship that has nothing to do with the inclusion of the German *Länder* in the *Bundesrepublik* or with the incorporation of the American states in the USA. It is true that European laws and directives prevail over national legislations, but only in the fields of competence that are explicitly attributed to the EU by the member states. Unlike all Federations, the EU has no competence over its own competences (136). The member states are partners of the EU; they are not subordinated to it. As regards EU citizens, they remain the ultimate source of political legitimacy. However, they must consider themselves, at the same time, as citizens of the EU and as citizens of their nation-state. Eventually, one of the main reasons why the nation-states

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹¹ Habermas, J. (2011), *Zur Verfassung Europas*, o. c., p. 8.

may not and should not be sublated, *aufgehoben* in a European Federal State, is that nation-states have succeeded in securing a certain level of political and social rights. In this respect, the idea of a postnational polity must be re-evaluated. Back in the 1990s, the postnational perspective appeared to be the right way to disconnect political participation from the closure of national identities and loyalties. Now, it seems to entail the risk of regressing below the level of political and social rights that has been achieved at nation-state level. Hence Habermas' revised position: after the shift from the national to the postnational, the shift from the postnational to the transnational.

In my opinion, there are also deeper reasons for such a move. Habermas' successive positions may be related to two of his fundamental critical attitudes: his anti-nationalism and his anti-state dispositions. On the one hand, he is apprehensive of the collusion between the political and the national. That is why he insisted, in the 1990s, that our present situation called for a disconnection between the political and the national. The development of new forms of political action and participation required that citizens liberate themselves from the constraints and limits of the national mindset. On the other hand, Habermas is defiant of the state. In his view, the very essence of the state is the institutionalization of power. His tradition of thought is that of Marx and Max Weber, it is not that of Aristotle, Rousseau and Hegel, which defines the state as a community of citizens. That is why Habermas repeatedly says, in his recent texts, that the state must be "civilized". There must be a "*Zivilisierung der staatlichen und gesellschaftlichen Gewaltverhältnisse*"¹². Such a *Zivilisierung* of the state is a remainder of Norbert Elias' *Prozeß der Zivilisation*¹³, which is a process of domestication and inhibition of violence. Applied to the state, the notion suggests that the state must be tamed and domesticated. In the republican tradition, however, the tradition that dates back to Plato and Aristotle and goes all the way down to Rousseau and Hegel, the state does not need to be civilized. What it needs is to be properly constituted. A state that is based on violence and arbitrary power is not a real state, but a sham of a state. In the republican tradition, the source of political legitimacy is the republican constitution. In Habermas' view, political legitimacy comes from civil society (137). It is civil society, not the state that is the true *locus* of the political. The most significant part of political action – of communicative action – develops in the "horizontal dimension" of civil society, not through the "vertical relationship" between state and citizens. And when it comes to such "vertical relationship", the bottom-up influence of citizens on government administration is more significant than the top-down action of the administration.

If I am right, this accounts – at least, in part – for the evolution in Habermas' thinking. Ideally speaking, there should be a disconnection between the political and the national and, at the same time, between the state and the political. Political interaction and participation develop when people are neither fenced in by national identities nor impeached by state power. When it comes to the European political structure, however, things are complicated. When insisting on the necessity to free citizens from the closure of the national mind, Habermas stresses the virtue of a European post-national political community. When pointing out the threat of a post-democratic European super-state, he insists on the virtue of a "horizontal", transnational civil society. In the 1990s, the idea was to disconnect the political from the national. That was the idea of a European polity that opened the way to a European constitutional patriotism. Now he wants to disconnect the political from the state – meaning

¹² Habermas, J., *Zur Verfassung Europas, o. c.*, p. 44. See also p. 57.

¹³ Elias, N (1969), *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*, Bern/München, Francke Verlag.

from the threat of a European post-democratic state – and in order to do so, he has to reconnect the political to the national.

But how is this conceivable if what used to be the nation's homogeneous culture no longer exists? In the 1990s, Habermas explained: a) that the sentiment of civic solidarity that made possible the redistribution of resources within the nation-state presupposed a homogeneous national culture, and b) that such homogeneity no longer existed. Now it seems that national cultures are more resilient and that we must count on the nation-states to maintain the cultural preconditions that are required in order to foster the sense of civic solidarity.

In fact, Charles Taylor's concept of interculturalism might be the solution. If we conceive of European nations as multicultural societies – meaning societies where the common political culture and social modes of communication do not reflect the prevalence of a given ethno-historic culture – the idea of a transnational democracy seems fragile. The notion of a *trans-national* democracy presupposes the existence of nations. On the part of citizens, it implies a sense of belonging to a given nation. Consequently, the notion of interculturalism is more consistent with the concept of transnational democracy, since interculturalism implies the existence of a majority, national culture, which is to be innerly enriched by newcomers. In a word, Habermas' transnational democracy needs Taylor's interculturalism – at least, in the European context (138). National cultures are not being fragmented and deconstructed. They are undergoing a process of enlargement and reinterpretation as they integrate newcomers and new generations.

However, this is probably not the last word. For it remains that Habermas' concept of a transnational, non-federal democracy does not measure up to the problem he himself raises. If the goal of the EU is to set the conditions for a joint, effective political action of the member states, some kind of federal organization is needed. In fact, it already exists in many respects and it is building up, even if chaotically, in the Eurozone – witness the increasing role of the European Central Bank, the idea of a European Banking Union, which raise more and more insistently the problem of the political control of such federal institutions. In other words, the problem is to determine whether or not a federal administration needs a federal form of democratic control. If the answer is positive, such a federative polity does not have to be modelled on the pattern of already existing federations like the USA or the German Federation. It must be an original, specific kind of polity. In this view, Europeans should not walk away from the idea of federalism for fear that they might not be able to domesticate or civilize it. For federalism is already there in many respects. The problem is to give it a proper democratic constitution. Of course, there is no historic necessity, which means that Europeans may well be unable to solve the problem. The EU is a success as regards the achievement of peace, the level of prosperity, the guarantee of individual rights. At least it is enough of a success to remain attractive to current and potential candidate countries. But the EU might still prove to be a failure as regards the capacity to be a co-decider at world level. Within the coming world order, Europe might well turn out to be something like a postmodern variant of the *Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation*. In the most favourable version of this scenario, the EU could evolve into a relatively secure, wealthy, culturally appealing and, politically, insignificant and irrelevant unit.