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Commissioned papers for the
Voices for the *Res Publica*: The Common Good in Europe

Report on the European round table

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The seventh round table in the Ford Foundation funded project 'Voices for the *Res Publica*: The Common Good in Europe', and the first comprehensive European round table was held in the UK in November 2008, under the auspices of the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR). The purpose of the round table was to bring together for the first time some of the leading voices of the previous six national round tables, so as to carry the entire project one step further. In order to keep the group small, so as to retain the depth and vitality of the debates, it was not possible to bring more than two or three participants from each country to the European round table. The choice was extremely difficult to make and those who did not attend, remain of course, integral members of the project.

The meeting had a double purpose: to see whether one could create a network of European *res publica* 'voices' who could dialogue among each other and intervene in public fora on some of the project's key themes with the advantage of comparative clout. And to determine whether one could build on the different national experiences in order to formulate common policy-making ideas. In order to facilitate the discussion, JPR had commissioned a set of papers from a selected group of national participants to cover the key themes that had emerged from the national round tables. The five key themes were: 'national identity', 'the law', 'the status of minorities', 'religion', 'the state and civil society'. Around thirty short papers have thus been produced which can be read either thematically or across the board in national terms.

In my previous national reports, I had presented the following *caveat*:

Summarizing a two-day round table with such a diverse group of participants inevitably implies confronting several risks. The first is that of generalizing on the basis of what a given number of individuals present said, when other participants in their place might have raised different issues or addressed the

same issues in a different manner. The second risk is that of 'essentializing', i.e., attributing a given person's comments to his or her ethnic background, political or religious affiliation, age or gender. Each individual is of course a sum of different experiences and identities which at times clash or reinforce each other in defining that person's outlook. Essentializing is a particularly dangerous proposition, especially for a project which seeks to build a new 'res publica' on a wide set of intertwined multiple identities. Yet, it is impossible not to generalize at some level if one is to use the round tables as a starting point for further 'res publica' debates. In the pages that follow, I have referred to given group identities (such as Christian, lay, Jewish, and also Muslim, but at other times Moroccan or Turk - conservative or progressive) only when what was being said stood out for having been said by a member of a given group who clearly invoked his or her given identity while grappling with the issue at stake. Similarly, I felt it was worth reporting when only members of a given group took stands on a given issue while others who belonged to other groups did not jump into the debate. Lastly, I refer to 'generations' when there was a clearly defined cluster of statements cutting across identities by persons of the same age group.

This *caveat* is even more pertinent for the European round table, where it was important to understand whether what was being said revealed an essential *national* aspect and vision of the debate or a shared 'feeling' across European boundaries which reflected more a given generational or cultural/religious angle. Both were crucial for the project.

Thanks to the papers, and to the fact that all the participants already knew 'the rules of the game', the round table debate took off immediately and covered the five key themes without any necessary preliminary presentations. There were twenty-one participants (two were unable to attend at the last minute). The group was composed of intellectuals, lawyers, NGO activists, most of whom were opinion-makers in their respective countries, and every ethnic and religious group was represented.

National identity and shared values

This was the topic where participants spoke most obviously as members (whether of the

national majority or of minorities) of their respective countries. The Swedish moderator launched this session by stressing that in many countries (including his own) debating the content of 'national identity' was a quite recent phenomenon. To prove his point, he mentioned that Sweden had created a 'national holiday' only very recently. Many other voices from the UK, the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany agreed concerning the novelty of this debate. The two exceptions on this front were, of course, France and on another level, Poland. One French participant started off the session by stressing that France had a long tradition of reflecting on the content of 'national identity', which was far more important as a concept than any discussion over pluralism. He proceeded to define national identity in France as based on five key points: language, citizenship, a strong public service, the concept of *laïcité* and a shared, even when conflicting, history, which, at times, was transformed into a 'broken narrative', as in the case of new communitarian assertions. He stressed that the victorious 1998 World Cup French football team may have been multiracial, but was not 'multicultural', since most of its players came from the West Indies, which had been French far longer than Alsace.

In perfect counterpoint, a Polish participant stressed that in the case of Poland, national identity was just as crucial but it was based traditionally on ethnicity, Catholicism, private ownership of the land and a national historical narrative that excluded all 'others'. Any identity emanating from the state or linked to the notion of citizenship was perceived as irrelevant to national 'belonging'. The Polish 'voice' who stressed the importance of an ethnic definition of national identity did so because he wanted the other participants to be aware that such an ethnic definition was prevalent in all the newly integrated central and eastern European countries that had entered the EU in recent years. One could not speak of a European *res publica* without taking this fact into account, for such ethnic majoritarian visions could not be simply wished away. They were here to stay.

The debate was thus framed by these two opposing definitions of national identity. Echoing the position of a Swedish immigrant voice, most participants

agreed that ethnicity could no longer underpin national identity in any of their countries. One Dutch participant stressed that national identity was not innate but had to be actively learned in cultural, historical and political terms by all citizens, even those who had 'always' been there. However, even those who advocated citizenship as the new necessary motor of a national identity 'process' were quick to stress that such an abstract concept no longer sufficed. It was impossible to separate it from a more innate feeling of 'identity', based on emotions, history and geography. Especially among the UK participants there was much discussion about the 'poor whites' who felt they had 'lost their country' to multiculturalism. There was now a shared feeling that these leftover members of the old majority deserved greater consideration and legitimacy. Majority 'rights' remained crucial. One German participant stressed instead that in Germany, the novelty still remained 'minority rights'. The Turkish minority, until recently left out of all national debates, was just beginning to understand the power of citizenship to make their voices and culture heard.

An important discussion ensued on the comparative importance of geography and history in the strengthening of national identity. A number of British and Dutch voices seemed to stress the importance of geography, in the notion of national belonging, claiming that immigrants often felt a stronger attachment to their city or to their region than to the nation state as such, and were, in turn, perceived to belong more easily at those levels by their majority counterparts (who perhaps shared the same preference for regional identities). A French voice coming from an immigrant background stressed that he felt European first and French only after, because the larger reference allowed him to hang on to multiple belongings. All Europeans had hyphenated identities, and so it was through Europe that he could define himself as French. No one else echoed this feeling, which was very forward-looking.

Other voices, mainly from Germany and Sweden, stressed instead the importance of history in any national identity. Immigrants had to take on the national past, warts and all, if they wanted to belong. Straddling both sides, one immigrant UK

voice stressed that the older immigrant communities were often closer to the majority populations than to new immigrant waves, and that in the process the historical 'we', in statements such as 'we did terrible things in our empire' versus 'we did great things in the empire' was becoming blurred. This constantly shifting 'we' was perhaps the best guarantee that no one could criticize minorities for 'aping' majorities as they tried to fit in. There was only one dissenting voice on this issue, coming from another British participant (of 'white' working-class origins) who argued, in a clear left-wing sense, that one could not blame the working classes for the historical faults of the elites.

The debate clearly showed that national belonging had to be redefined beyond ethnicity but had to go beyond the abstract notion of citizenship. A deeper identity 'glue' had to be found, and this common search prompted one (French) participant to wonder whether *in the very long term*, the French definition of national identity – albeit without the French cultural imperative – might not hold out the most promise.

The law

A significant proportion of the round table participants were either trained in law, active lawyers or judges. This session, concerning the different points of legal tension across different European countries, was thus particularly enlightening. The following key themes emerged from the discussion:

- The increasing tendency to have judges and lawyers become the key arbiters of political debates in place of politicians, who forfeit their responsibility to debate societal issues in the political and parliamentary realm.
- The danger of having a 'dictatorship of the law' with the state taking over social, ethical and political issues which should be debated first within civil society because they imply citizen responsibilities.
- The issue of whether the law should specifically mirror the needs of minorities and also whether such groups should be physically represented inside the entire judicial system including among judges.
- The parameters within which to limit hate

speech while protecting free speech and the role of cultural traditions in defining the border between the two concepts.

- The relationship between local national laws emerging out of a given tradition, versus the often perverse effects of 'one size fits all' European laws.

With the exception of one French participant who stressed that it was precisely the role of judges and the courts to have the final word over controversial political issues, the rest of the group worried about the excessive turning to the legal system to solve social and political clashes. There was a consensus that many of these clashes should have been resolved in the political sphere...if only politicians were courageous enough to take strong stands, rather than seeking consensus at all costs in order to be re-elected. Judges could not and should not, according to this view, become the arbiter of societal debates, especially since many of the laws that they were asked to validate were often 'catch all' and badly formulated since they tried to please all. This stand was upheld by the legal voices from the Netherlands and Germany.

The voices representing civil society, whether in Poland, the UK or Germany, were most keen to defend the role of the citizen and of civil society institutions in ensuring that the state remains accountable for its democratic values. One Polish voice stressed that too much state legislation put citizens 'to sleep' with respect to their moral and legal responsibilities. This was particularly true in issues of ethnic or religious discrimination and memory (particularly those linked to Holocaust denial). In his view, citizens could become complacent if it was assumed that these responsibilities belonged to the state. Civic alliances and citizen awareness lay at the heart of democratic states, not just laws, whose application was perceived to be the state's responsibility. Once again the French voice disagreed, stressing that it was indeed the state and the judicial system's responsibility to ensure that society comply to certain standards and to protect citizens from disorder. In this view it was entirely logical that the French state had decreed in the 19th century after the abolition of slavery that it was illegal to advocate or praise slavery, just as it was a crime to engage in Holocaust denial. On the

issue of laws against Holocaust denial, a German voice stressed that when these laws were first enacted in Germany, they were meant to protect the German majority (not any minuscule Jewish minority) from any renewed temptation to listen to neo-Nazi 'sirens'.

The question of minority representation in the legal system provoked strong disagreement among members of different minorities. More secular Muslim voices from the UK and Sweden argued strongly against minorities having their own 'niches' or representation inside the judicial system. The British voice felt that there was a 'mythical' aspect to the law (linked to its formal blindness) which should not be trivialized by turning the judiciary into a sociological mirror of society's composition. He also stressed that there was no guarantee that lawyers and judges emanating from minorities would be more effective in their tasks. Much great jurisprudence had emanated from the wisdom of old non-representative elites. The Swedish voice wondered, in a provocative manner, whether the quest for greater minority representation would not ultimately lead to separate jurisdictions or judgements in function of the group in question, not unlike in colonial settings.

A Jewish voice from Germany, seconded by a Dutch religious Muslim and two voices of Muslim background, one from Germany and one from France, took the opposite tack. They argued that minorities would feel they truly belonged in their respective countries if they felt their specific needs were listened to in the judiciary realm, and above all in the lawmaking process. The Jewish voice from Germany and the Muslim Dutch voice argued for specific collective minority rights in order to protect minorities and their identities from the ignorance and indifference of majorities who could not possibly know the constraints linked to living as a minority in a given country.

The discussion ended with the issue of whether the law should reflect the values of society as a whole. On this count, most participants felt that the law should take into account, within certain limits, the different cultural values present in a society, but only if they did not contradict the laws' fundamental principles of equality, human rights etc. A

Dutch judge stressed that this type of debate was not new but had accompanied legal reflections for centuries, and that the law evolved with time and changing circumstances. On this count, many participants felt that the Polish voice was still speaking from an anti-totalitarian position derived from the Communist experience, and that one had to return to a more positive reading of the state rather than emphasizing the ways of protecting oneself against it.

The status of minorities

The German moderator began by asking a rhetorical question: whether the debate concerning minorities would disappear if equal opportunities were guaranteed to all citizens. The consensus was that minority issues would remain pertinent even in the most open of societies.

A German voice stressed that the integration debate was deeply flawed because it neglected the fact that both majorities and minorities had to evolve to meet common challenges. Most governments tended to think of this debate instead as a technical issue, whereas it lay at the core of all political and social questionings. A French voice stressed that European countries had a long history of having to confront minorities. Social mobility and jobs determined whether such minorities were properly integrated, more than any political debate. A Swedish immigrant voice reiterated that state policies did not work. For immigrants to integrate, there was the need to 'upgrade' national identities into a more open and flexible version, in his analysis a sort of 'Swedishness 2.0'. That could only be achieved by no longer defining the concept in physical terms (blue eyes) or in terms of old folk rituals. A German voice asked whether what was required was an 'Americanization' of identity, where there were no racial or religious connotations whatsoever today to being an American.

The Polish voice stood out again by stressing that Europe was full of ethnic national minorities that had left their own lands and bore little comparison to the new 'foreign' immigrants who had reached the continent since the war and increasingly so in the last few decades. National minorities did not seek to integrate, but properly accepted that, with

their differences and multiple belonging, they were the source of incredible cultural wealth. To prove this, he stressed that Polish culture had always been produced at the periphery. Now that there were no longer national minorities in its midst, the country had become 'boring'. A German voice responded that internal minorities already participated in any country's political life, with guaranteed representations and rights, whereas new immigrants possessed no such structural legitimacy.

An older established Swedish voice stressed that Sweden had created official 'national minorities' only recently, in order to distinguish them from the new arrivals. And these had to be broken down into two different categories: the asylum seekers as refugees and classical economic immigrants. The majority population judged both groups by their desire to integrate into the wider society. But this was also true of the immigrants who did not necessarily wish to remain part of a separate community. A younger Swedish immigrant voice of Muslim background stressed that there was a generation gap. Older immigrants did not mind being self-confined, but their children felt the social barriers far more acutely, since many did want to integrate but were not truly accepted. Yet another Swedish voice stressed that majorities evolved as well through time, and besides, there were many different ways of belonging to a majority Swedish culture, both in social and intellectual terms. Furthermore no one obliged immigrants to participate in folkloric rituals or holidays. This intra-Swedish debate was valid for other national settings as well, as stressed by a young German voice of Turkish background. In her view, new immigrants were not discriminated against because they did not go to Church but because they did not belong in terms of implicit cultural references. Some countries were less tolerant than others on this count. Another German voice felt that time played a positive role. Younger 'Teutonic' generations were far more tolerant because they had grown up and gone to school with children of other origins and were familiar with them.

A more sceptical British immigrant voice agreed. He stressed that there were no 'fourth generation' children of immigrants who were not fully integrated. One had to accept that in all historical contexts,

there had always been a 'sacrificed generation'. The only problem was that immigrants were often integrated into the underclass, but that was a social not a minority issue. The Polish voice replied that internal minorities did not integrate at any generation: not the old Jews of eastern Europe, nor the Roma, so it was not a matter of time for them—one more reason to distinguish among minorities. A German voice stressed that integration could be variable, on some counts but not on others, and that the integration process was not linear, since many members of the third generation were less integrated than their parents. A French voice referred to the 'dis-assimilation' of many French Jews in recent years as a possible danger.

The session ended with a feeling that most of the problems placed under the minority/majority label, especially in terms of immigrants, were socio-economic in nature. All the other types of integrations could find solutions in an ever more open space with different cultural and human rights references, and on this count, Europe, as a supra-national identity, played a positive role.

Religion

The session was launched by a young Catholic reformist voice from Poland. She advocated less intense ties between state and Church in her country and felt that the Church would be better off if it received less support from the State, and fewer 'favours' from politicians. She also felt the Church had no right to address the state by making political 'demands' in Bishop's letters on such issues as *in vitro* reproduction or other advanced medical technologies. (To which a French voice replied that, in France, before the separation of Church and state in 1905, the state gave money to the Church as a way of better controlling it). Another Polish voice (of Jewish background) felt that it was important to distinguish between the presence of religion in the *res publica* (which was positive) since the right to practise a religion constituted one of the basic human rights, from the presence of religious institutions (whose power should instead be closely controlled). Poland was perhaps the only country represented where one could speak of the Church abusing its position inside the state.

Participants from other countries felt that Church/state relations worked rather well, and that there was no need to overhaul them. Religion was not discriminated against in the public space. This was particularly true with respect to the German situation where the different Christian churches (and Jewish groups) were very active in societal debates through their Academies, but also knew their limits in the wider public discourse. In his view it was important to hear the conservative positions of the Catholic Church over scientific innovations, for they were not necessarily retrograde. The same positive impression was shared by the UK voices (where there is an Established Church), and in Sweden, where the Lutheran Church was de-established in 2002. In Holland, where the Reformed Churches were historically the most important, a longstanding sharing of public space with the Catholics had created an institutional balance.

The most interesting reflections to emanate from these Western European voices related to secularism and even atheism. There was a widespread agreement that religious voices and a religious outlook were important forces in civil society but also in dialogue with the state. Atheism was considered to be closer to a strident belief rather than to a lack of belief. Many participants who defined themselves as being personally without religion stressed that religious answers had to be listened to because the secular camp had found no satisfying responses to any social or ethical question. A *res publica* without openly accepted religious input, in the words of one self-defined British atheist, would open itself to dire consequences, for those who believed would then opt to go underground and take on very extreme views. Most participants agreed that all religions were based on non-negotiable values and that the point of making their views heard in the wider public was not to turn them into negotiable bargaining chips, but to add another dimension to important ethical debates, and to help define or elaborate minimal collective 'values'.

The discussion then turned to the main question of Islam and its position inside European societies, and inevitably addressed the issue of religious fundamentalism. No one questioned Islam's place in the European religious equilibrium. The group

addressed it in terms of free speech versus hate speech, with a specific reference to the Danish cartoon incident. As could be expected, those participants who spoke from a religious position were the most critical of the affront made to Muslims as a community through the cartoons. The right to caricature did not imply the right to offend. The lay participants stressed instead the need for Muslims in Europe to understand that Western culture had a long tradition of polemics with established churches. In this perspective, the right to blaspheme (against God) was a fundamental right. The group as a whole, including the religious Muslim voices, reached a consensus that in a democracy it was possible to 'offend God' through blasphemy, but that offending a given community of believers was something that needed to be legally sanctioned. However, the community of believers needed to understand the cultural context in which they lived to make sure that they were not 'offended' by something other religious believers had come to accept as part of a free society.

Once again, the two Polish voices stressed that civil society should not abdicate the moral responsibility of ensuring religious groups were not offended. The law could not solve everything, for neither decency nor respect – two crucial attitudes in any democracy and truly *civil* society – could be legislated or legally enforced. Furthermore the presence of religious voices inside the *res publica* implied that secular societies overcome their frequent implicit assumption that religious voices always had a (hidden) 'agenda'.

In terms of politics, one Muslim religious voice from the Netherlands stressed that Muslims were not sufficiently protected compared to Jews, who were in a 'better situation' because they could invoke protective anti-racist legislation on their behalf. Muslims did not constitute a race. They did not even, in her opinion, constitute a coherent internally self-defined group, but were for now a loose galaxy of believers with very different cultural traditions who had been lumped together as 'Muslims' as an external (and pejorative) European category. Hence the amalgam constantly made between all Muslims and a few extremists. A French Muslim voice added that 9/11 had compounded the situation by turning Islam into

a suspicious creed and movement. Whereas the Swedish Muslim voice wondered whether extremist religious Muslims had not also played their part in this situation by broadcasting an intolerant version of their religion, one that included clear discrimination against young women.

A French voice concluded the debate with an important reference: namely, that French jurisprudence had chosen to stress the context in which anti-religious statements were made in trying to determine whether they constituted blasphemy or hate speech. A teacher making such comments in a classroom or a politician in a meeting would be guilty; a newspaper publishing caricatures or an artistic production mocking some religious aspects would not. It was thus no accident that Plantu, one of France's leading cartoonists in *Le Monde*, always included representatives from the three monotheist faiths in his anti-religious cartoons. The *res publica* in Europe would only flourish when these distinctions were accepted by all and when rational and religious discourse were understood to be complementary for each needed to be criticized by the other to strengthen its own role.

Civil society and the state

This session was moderated by the Polish participant with a great internal experience of the Solidarnosc movement. He began by asking the group how they would define the link between the state and civil society, and whether civil society could keep the state out of the picture.

This question led to a very interesting exchange between this Polish voice whose fear of too much state power was conditioned by the Communist years, and a Swedish participant who instead, in the best Swedish tradition, considered the state to be a mostly positive and even benign actor. The Pole saw the state as an entity that needed to be constantly controlled and counterbalanced by civil society. The Swede saw it instead as the logical extension of civil society, particularly in its social democratic incarnation.

The group's reactions to this debate revealed interesting geographical and generational differences. A younger Swedish immigrant voice felt that it was important to establish a clear well marked

distance between the state and civil society, for he feared that a state that defined itself as 'good' could easily hijack civil society and its actors by creating tidy little 'identity boxes', thus numbing all complex debate. A German voice stressed the danger of having a German public opinion which instinctively distrusted (also for historical reasons) the state while granting too much confidence to NGOs, whose agendas were not always clear and who could also be manipulated by the state, with money, visibility, access to decision-making etc. Hence the need to keep a 'safe distance' between the two, always bearing in mind that civil society sounded great as an abstract term, but needed to be monitored carefully in reality.

A British voice was startled to see this distrust of civil society, for who else could one trust? To which the Polish moderator replied by extolling the value of ever vigilant mistrust, for even democratic states could inflict far greater damage than any civil society actor. One could assume good intentions on all sides, but it was vital to check constantly. The Swedish voice rebutted by stressing the importance of *a priori* trust as the crucial building block of any valid *res publica*. One could always check later, but trust was primordial.

A French voice close to the trade union movement stressed that civil society was already present in the state by way of Parliament, and could not just be considered as a loose 'thing' that filled the 'gaps' in state action. To which a German voice replied that a legislative state did not necessarily protect civil society discussion, for it had a tendency to rely on 'experts' and their commissions rather than on active civil society voices. A young Dutch voice stressed that the very concept of civil society had to be redefined to centre it on social entrepreneurs, business, and the state organs which worked with them. While the Dutch judge stressed that what one expected of the state (and not of civil society) was its *predictability* and *due process*. To which one Swedish voice replied that 'predictability' was not a virtue *per se*. Some horrible dictatorial states were completely 'predictable'.

A further distinction was made by the Polish voice, who stressed that civil society actors were best on 'single issue causes' whereas one expected the

state to take a larger and interconnected viewpoint, since it was meant to regroup multiple interests. One had to make sure, however, that the state did not pump civil society for its own interests, withering it in the process.

The discussion moved to political parties, which traditionally had been the institution that regrouped society's multiple grassroots interests. But now many participants felt political parties were no longer fulfilling their responsibility, preferring to think of themselves as representing one sociological group or cause, not unlike NGOs. The result was that democracies had been turned into horse-trading exercises with a concomitant loss of general interest.

Many voices shared this reading, feeling that no group was performing its duties properly, neither the government, nor political parties, nor trade unions, especially when they knew they were being filmed, and therefore accountable to their respective constituencies. A German voice wondered whether civil society would take a secondary position in the current economic crisis where one had lost all faith in 'market forces'. A UK voice felt political parties were ever less representative of society as a whole, with Labour in particular, being taken over by Etonians. A Dutch voice stressed that political candidates were put on election lists in a most undemocratic way. A French voice stressed the fact that new groups were excluded from the political parties, and that even when they were called in by the state for consultation, they 'froze' without significant negotiations, because they knew they were being scrutinized by their respective constituencies.

Two other German voices sought to balance the discussion by stressing that the state and civil society could interact positively. NGOs often carried out state initiatives, for instance training the spouse of an immigrant so that she could master the German language and thus fit into the new state-derived rules. A German academic stressed that the state did much co-founding of civil society actors. Perhaps the solution was to make such grants available only when more than one civil society actor was involved so that there would be internal checks and balances and also less risk of

co-option. Transparency was vital on all counts. One Swedish voice reasserted the importance of the state by saying it could make a very positive difference in society, citing the contrast between Swedish (calming) and Danish (aggravating) state actions toward immigrants.

This session ended with a strong shared condemnation of the political system in each country. Clearly democracy was not working since new immigrants were not being brought into the system, which no longer responded to society's changing needs. And 'Europe' was perceived as being part of the problem and not the solution, since it was even less grassroots oriented than its respective states.

This blanket judgement on the part of round table participants, who all claimed to be pro-European, is worth noting. Irrespective of their age, most of the voices spoke out of concrete disappointment. The older ones (a Swedish and a Dutch voice) increasingly resented the EU tendency to over-legislate, thus destroying the important cultural and traditional national underpinnings of national laws (which they deemed to be highly positive since they had evolved out of a concern to have different social groups 'live together'). They also worried that the European legislator lacked any democratic legitimacy since it acted out of its own highly detached technocratic sphere. A younger Polish voice expressed the disappointment of the new countries that the EU had not actively helped democratic forces to gain power, happily accepting, instead, the old elites with their old clientele networks which were greatly strengthened and even amplified through EU membership. She was even sceptical about the various European youth initiatives which threw money out of the window by organizing festivals where fun was stressed and no complex issue was ever addressed.

This attitude was best summarized by the fact that no one in the group mentioned the forthcoming June European Parliamentary elections as an event that might have some possible connection with the European *res publica* project. 'Strasbourg' rang no bells, even though two French voices made a timid attempt to say something positive about Europe. The first claimed that the European Parliament was becoming a more serious place in terms of legislative power. The second stated that there obviously

was no European 'state', but that something that could be called a European 'civil society' was slowly coming to the fore. They were the only ones, and perhaps it was no accident that they were French. All the others saw Europe as 'missing' and above all as a disappointment.

Building a *res publica*

In the welcoming letter to the round table, participants had been asked to reflect on what meaning they attributed to the very term *res publica* and how they wished to pursue the project.

These are some of the suggestions which emerged:

- A reflection on the role of language and culture as integrative factors for new immigrants.
- Analyzing the shifting contents of terms such as 'minority' and 'majority', with the assumption that the more people felt they belonged selectively to both on different issues, the more a society would be integrated.
- A reflection on what a common European public sphere might entail in terms of shared themes in strengthening civil society.
- Building the notion of a 'common destiny' uniting majorities and minorities at a European level, as a way of bringing different groups to work together.
- Concentrating on the 'soft power' of identity, even in anthropological terms. What was required to make minorities feel comfortable: as an example, would European dinner parties take into account the fact that Muslims do not drink alcohol?
- Defining the rules of engagement in order to overcome misunderstandings and apathy. Learning from other national experiences on precise questions.
- Fighting against the possible recrudescence of closed nationalisms as they mushroom in the new countries of the EU.
- Rethinking nationalism without an ethnic component to create a new sense of belonging beyond multiculturalism.
- Analyzing what the term 'European' meant outside of Europe in order to use it to better integrate minorities within, in terms of 'values'.
- Fighting against social exclusion, a key

component of immigrant problems.

- Rethinking the notion of Citizenship as a key to belonging to a community.
- Rethinking the notion of the 'General Interest'. Can it be useful in the integration of minorities?
- The problem of the demonization of 'the Other'.

Further work

These are general categories but they help define how the key five points of the project should be approached.

Above all, they provide the content with which to continue the project in its double dimension:

- Providing enough comparative material for possible policy-making recommendations, which will rest on some European-wide research.
- Fixing a few themes which members of the group will want to pursue in voluntary subgroups and in coordination with one another.

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The programme for this round table is available online at:

http://www.jpr.org.uk/common-good-in-europe/downloads/round_table_europe_programme.pdf