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

Report on the German round table
23 - 25 February 2008

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A jpr/ Institute for Jewish Policy Research project sponsored by the Ford Foundation

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The fifth national round table in the Ford Foundation funded project 'Voices for the *Res Publica*: the Common Good in Europe' was held in Germany in February 2008, under the auspices of the London-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and the Potsdam-based Einstein Forum. The purpose of the round table, as defined in the project's manifesto, was to bring together a carefully chosen group of opinion-formers and academics to foster a frank and in-depth 'off the record' exchange of views on the conflicts, underlying fears and deep defensive reflexes that exist within each minority or majority group, in other words, those factors which had led to a weakened common public space.

It is, of course, very difficult for the person who conceived the entire project, and planned the round table programme to write an 'objective' report on the round table's outcome. I trust that my non-German astigmatism will compensate for my deep involvement in the very shape of the project. I can only hope this will contribute to a more detached reading of the proceedings. I hope the German participants will feel challenged by this summary, much as I was throughout the entire two days of debates. Nevertheless, when reading what follows, please bear in mind this personal *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 Turk - rather than Muslim - conservative or progressive, 'Wessie' or 'Ossie') 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.

Preliminary remarks on the round table

The German round table was composed of fourteen German participants, plus two Americans – the director of the Einstein Forum and the Vice-President of the Ford Foundation – plus the British representative of JPR and myself, with a more continental and French perspective.

The German participants constituted a highly diverse geographical, sociological and professional group which mirrored quite faithfully Germany's composite identities and generational shifts. They came from the West German Rhineland and Ruhr, the East German Länder, from 'special' Berlin, as well as from Frankfurt and Hanover. The older participants were formed in pre-1989 Germany as members of the Bonn Republic or as dissidents of the GDR, while the younger participants reflected the new more homogeneous stakes of the Berlin Republic. Even the members of the 'minorities' incarnated the complexities of their respective groups: there was a postwar-born Jew with Mittel-European origins and a younger Jew from the post-1989 Russian migration. There was a German-born lay woman of Turkish background and a German-born Kurdish Turk veiled woman, as well as the usual mixture of Protestant, Catholic and secular voices, with very different readings of their own

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German pasts.

In professional terms there were several academics and social and political activists with grassroot ties to Germany's main political parties, one social worker, a cultural activist, plus several specialists of education, immigration, intercultural relations, a judge and a constitutional law specialist. Two participants held political positions at the local and regional levels and there was a historian to give greater perspective to the debates. Missing were a journalist and an entrepreneur who were unable to come at the last minute.

This mix turned out to be ideal, for in a country as large and as varied as Germany, all participants were able to discover new viewpoints and sensitivities coming from other Germans they rarely, if ever, encountered. Bringing together 'Ossies', 'Wessies', 'old' Germans, Jews and Turks meant that each group had to confront new interlocutors beyond the usual bilateral dialogues so favoured by every German foundation and forum. The *res publica* debate in the German context was thus devoid of any partisan rhetoric. The round table format was particularly fruitful in a country which had begun to define itself, both in function of, but also beyond, the weight of its past.

The German round table stood out with respect to all previous ones for four highly specific reasons:

1) Given its Nazi past and the long period of post-war political division, 'Germany' as a united country with recognizable majority and minority populations was very much still 'in the making.' All participants stressed the degree to which the national image still had not 'jelled', so that everyone was confronted with an identity quest, not just immigrants. The image that came to my mind was that of tectonic identity plates interacting with one another and sliding one above the other, to reform a new national setting, but without causing an earthquake or provoking major political tensions or violence.

2) Because of this still unclear national image, the Germans in the round table were far more willing to compare their country with other European nations. On nearly every topic addressed, voices could be heard either stressing how similar problems occurred elsewhere in Europe or the degree to which problems were indeed unique. Interestingly, the same people could take opposing visions on this count depending on the issue at hand, so that no group advocated, as in past German history, the need for a special and different German path, *Sonderweg,* to the *res publica.* The German round table was particularly fruitful because it lacked all self-centred national blindfolds.

3) The voices of the East German participants stood out because they brought very different nuances to the debate. First of all, they clearly considered themselves as members of a 'minority', and one that had not been given a proper hearing. Secondly, they proved the degree to which Germany today also had to face non-Western problems (also confronted in the Polish round table), linked to the Stalinist legacy and to the importance of the prescriptive state. Thirdly, they were carriers of old national cultural reflexes which Western countries did not need to confront, but which were becoming an integral part of the new German *potpourri.* These 'eastern' voices turned out to be those of the most geographically 'stable' Germans, those who neither migrated after the war nor were forced to adjust to German resettlement, but remained, instead, rooted in their lands. These voices were not submitted to the decades of West German commemorative repentance, with its concomitant internalized political correctness. They also had virtually no immigrant experience, and once, liberated from the Communist repression and demoted to a minority position inside united Germany, they were remarkably free in their opinions and outlooks. I had the impression that they brought 'ancient' sounds to the round table, which were in the process of acquiring a highly relevant 'modern' ring.

4) Finally, and for obvious reasons, the German 'past', including the Holocaust, was not just an important historical reference, as in the other round tables, but very much of a living, still not fully integrated, factor with respect to the future. The past hovered over all the debates and influenced all groups, including the new immigrants. Religion, on the other hand, was virtually absent from the debates as a topic, as though its impact had been too ferocious in the long German past, starting with the Thirty Years War, to be able to be handled in pass-

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ing. Or perhaps Germans had still not truly factored Judaism and Islam into their own careful Protestant-Catholic balance, so that the religious issue (solved between Protestants and Catholics) had still not appeared on present-day radar screens. Whatever the reason, this failure to evoke a topic which lay, instead, at the core of France's fractious identity, Britain's daily life, Poland's essence, and Sweden's search for roots, set Germany apart from all the previous round tables.

A comment on the round table dynamics. The German participants turned out to be surprisingly informal and direct in their discussions. I was amazed by the degree of familiarity and friendliness that developed among very different types of participants who had not known each other before, far more so than in either France or Sweden. Perhaps this openness came from the fact that the Germans all considered themselves as relative newcomers to a new German context that was still being defined. It was as if they all felt on more or less equal footing in a new national setting where no one could claim to be the rightful 'owner' of the country. As one younger participant from the Ruhr stated, for the longest time no one felt good about being German, including the immigrants who did not wish to take on such an identity, so that there was no precious 'old timer' pride to be found within the country, where everyone seemed to be new to the task of defining a German *res publica.* Armed with this double awareness, participants were truly free to talk with the openness and questioning of neophytes, but neophytes endowed with a particularly strong sense of moral and historical responsibility. This responsibility, beyond the friendliness, gave a special tone of gravity and soul-searching to the debates.

As a result of this collegial spirit, the image of Germany that emerged from the round table was a remarkably calm one. All sides agreed that Germany was a 'work in progress'. To the question, whether the 'time line' was moving upwards or downwards in terms of progress, the German responses all pointed to a national setting that was finally able to tackle its identity problems and 'think' in a global and mature manner.

I left the round table with the strong impression that the very different voices present had enriched one another. There was a contrapuntal air to the round table, as though each participant were singing his or her part in a political and social cantata with a potentially serene rather than tragic outcome.

This spirit very much prevailed in addressing the five core topics of the round table: 1) Constitutional 'patriotism' and the German 'identity' debate; 2) The past and its role in the shaping of contemporary German identities; 3) The role of the state in the creation of German society; 4) The integration of minorities; 5) The necessary building blocks of a new *res publica*.

Constitutional patriotism and the German identity debate

This topic turned out to be one of the most important and interesting of the entire round table since it covered the very foundations of the new postwar German democratic order. The round table began with a positive interpretation of Germany's present-day identity. The West German philosopher who launched the discussion stressed the degree to which a German consensus had been crafted around the core values of the *Grundgesetz,* the German Basic Law, an equivalent of the 'Bill of Rights' at the heart of the West German postwar Constitution. He was convinced that Germans of all origins had slowly accepted the idea of 'constitutional patriotism', as the new glue of a German state that eschewed all ethnic or historical definitions of 'belonging'.

He also stressed that Germans had become increasingly aware that Germany had become a country with immigrants, if not an immigrant country. Furthermore he felt that the recent elections in Hesse had proved that xenophobic statements no longer paid off in electoral terms, neither for the extreme right nor for the extreme left across the political spectrum. He also felt Germany had made major strides in confronting its black past, citing Holocaust commemoration and the Berlin memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe as a case in point, and this statement was rendered more powerful given the fact that he himself was a Jew. Finally, he felt that Germany had achieved a con-

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sensus based on a 'thin' identity. The only viable, leading culture or *Leikultur* could only be grounded in the constitution, in loyalty to a German fiscal regime, and above all in the acceptance of a common language....everything else being negotiable and left to the desires of the individuals.

This sanguine 'kick-off' immediately elicited a spate of reactions. Several participants, including a former 'Ossie' dissident voice who thus came late to the political culture of the Federal republic, questioned whether all Germans truly adhered to this constitutional patriotism, or even knew the rights and values inscribed in the *Grundgesetz.* Others added that constitutional patriotism did not prevent strong racism in everyday life and that values did not necessarily lead to proper behaviour, as witnessed by countless racist incidents. An educator argued that knowing these rights did not automatically lead to their practical implementation since, for instance, human rights were not even taught in schools, and that it was very hard to determine whether political literacy should precede or follow democratic experience. The judge with Turkish origins argued instead that people did know the spirit of the law and lived by its values, as could be seen by the growing number of cases in court dealing with domestic violence. Immigrants had to accept, and were slowly accepting, that to be 'German' meant subscribing to these fundamental values.

The debate took an even more interesting twist when a political and social educator from the former East Germany declared quite simply that 'constitutional patriotism' was too cold and abstract a concept to serve as a glue for national belonging, especially for the weaker and less politically literate target populations with whom she dealt. She argued for a warmer and more emotional definition of 'being German', one based on love of the country and a visceral feeling of physical belonging in the country's landscape. Only with such a feeling could one then ask citizens to display the necessary political courage and involvement in the democratic contract. The former 'Ossie' went even so far as saying that she was happy to know that her grandfathers were buried in the cemetery near her house, that this constituted her deepest feeling of German belonging.

This candid and outspoken emotional vision (which could only have been uttered in a closed and off the record setting) went against all the aseptic official language of Germany's postwar democratic identity, which carefully avoided any reference to 'love of the fatherland', emotional ties to its soil, or ancestral definitions of belonging. Inevitably it produced a cascade of reactions. Some were just as emotional as hers, particularly that of a Jewish voice who stated that not everyone was lucky enough to know where their grandparents were buried. Others defended 'constitutional patriotism' by saying that it was not a cold, bloodless concept but one which contained its own emotions in its plea for the dignity of man. One could flesh it out a bit, but it was out of the question to replace it with 'love' for the fatherland.

A conservative politician with close ties to the old Bonn Republic mused that embedding any German identity in the past led to an insoluble dilemma, for the Nazi years stood as an insurmountable barrier, with the attendant question of how it had been possible for an entire people to have been led astray into barbarism with such relative ease. Since there was no clear answer to such a question, it was just as unclear to see how warm feelings toward the 'past' could be of any use in shaping a German present. Constitutional patriotism was the only answer to this dilemma, a way of trying to create a new glue, and perhaps, in the long run, it could be perceived as a temporary aid on the way to a new, inclusive and healthy patriotic reference.

A younger politician, also from the West, stressed that the group agreed on fundamentals and was merely divided by adjectives. He felt that the new generation of young Germans was among the most tolerant and responsible, fully committed to the principles of the constitution, while also emotionally tied to their part of Germany, as he was to the Ruhr. In this vision, even the use of verbal slurs in schools against Turks was a way of integrating them into the wider German identity. As if to confirm this trend a political science professor from East Germany stressed that those youths who practised intolerance and racism were mainly to be found among the losers of globalization, those who had no hope for the future and no clear identity, and found no sympathetic ear in any political party.

This extremism did not reflect German society as a whole. The judge with Turkish origins and the younger Jewish voice were far less sanguine about such a reading of youthful extremism. .

The debate then shifted to the subject of *Leitkultur.* The term had originally been coined by a conservative politician in the late 1990s to convey the fact that Germany had a core culture and that immigrants had to adapt to it if they wished to integrate. Since then, there had been much discussion on just how 'thick' or 'thin' such a leading culture had to be, and whether Germany should even have one.

Those participants who came from the former East Germany clearly believed that there was a specific German culture, in the landscape and in the past for the political educator, even in the flag and above all in the state. For another former 'Ossie', who had been trained as a theologian, German culture was closely intertwined with Lutheranism and with its tradition of singing as a cultural phenomenon that bound Germans together, initially against Catholic dogma, but then as a community.

They were rebutted by the judge with Turkish origins who flatly stated that she had absolutely no feeling or empathy for any German tradition or custom or anything that could be described as 'typically German', a position that could have been shared by many of Germany's new Jews as well. What interested her were democratic values. A Berlin-based cultural activist with a brief political experience in the Berlin Senate made a plea against any *Leitkultur,* claiming that only artistic and non-verbal cultural forms could integrate people from different cultures in a context where national states were losing their importance. While another participant from Western Germany stressed that local patriotism was an inherently German trait deeply rooted in the European tradition, a trait that could be used to ground German culture against its Nazi past. This part of the debate ended when the judge argued that she could very easily accept the Lutheran feelings of belonging shared by some of her fellow citizens, as long as she did not have to comply with them to be considered a 'good' German.

The historian and the philosopher in the group both stressed that a society with immigrants could not invoke the depth of field of its 'dead' as a founding element of its identity. Democratic societies were the product of both 'Space' and 'Culture', with the key word being 'Space', since it was the place where different types of citizens integrated and that this meeting space could not be defined by ancestral traditions. Across Europe, traditions might resurface but only as 'invented traditions' that could be adopted in a symbolic and playful manner, even by people with no blood ties to the 'old' Germans. Only in this sense could one reconcile 'constitutional patriotism' with a quest for a 'thicker' German identity.

What characterised this first getting to know each other session was the unusual degree of frankness and strong beliefs which all participants exhibited in responding to the sessions' questions. The era of silent German consensus over democracy was clearly over. What one could witness in the round table was the rebirth of a vibrant contrarian culture, but one based on the acceptance of everyone's shared belonging.

The past in the creation of group identities

This issue was debated heatedly in the round table given the fact that the past, in particular the Nazi past, continued to mould all German identities, including those of recent immigrants. The participants focused in this context on the Holocaust and its commemoration, debating whether this reference would ultimately play a constructive or far more ambiguous role in the creation of a future German *res publica.*

Perhaps because the round table setting allowed participants to transcend 'political correctness', the debate was particularly honest and may have signalled a shift in the wind. The majority of participants were no longer sure that Holocaust commemoration was the effective panacea with which to combat all German problems or ills. The perverse effects of this commemoration were beginning to make themselves felt, not just among 'old' Germans or 'new' Turkish immigrants, but also among the Jewish voices present in the discussion.

Only one, that of the Western philosopher, spoke convincingly of the benefits stemming from Holo-

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caust commemoration, interpreting it as a founding moment of a new German identity, one which had to be shared by all citizens irrespective of their ethnic or religious origins. He pointed to the fact that some Muslim students refused to integrate the Holocaust past, skipping class when special days were devoted to the topic in school with the presence of survivors, thus refusing, in his view, to integrate the wider German consensus. In his view, being 'German' implied sharing history's dark load, even when one was a Jew.

The other Jewish 'voices' disagreed. One, speaking as a mother, stressed the degree to which even her own children were suffering from Holocaust 'fatigue' in school, with the Nazi past becoming increasingly equated with rote learning. More important, she stressed the degree to which one should not be moulding future generations with only the lessons of past horror and with examples of resisters, such as the members of the White Rose student group or of the Stauffenberg assassination attempt against Hitler, who had all been killed for their heroism. The time had come to present living, positive examples of successful resistance, rather than remaining stuck in a past-dominated society.

A younger Russian-born Jewish voice also wondered whether the emphasis on historical narrative was not an obstacle to the integration of immigrants. It could only sharpen the divide between 'them' and 'us', since the past implied that there was a collective 'we'. He did not feel that Germany's Jews had to take the Nazi past unto themselves as part of their own contemporary German identity, and could thus implicitly understand that the Turks might feel likewise. Furthermore he was not convinced that Holocaust monuments carried permanent 'lessons' which would resonate convincingly through time, and even less convinced about the 'universal lessons' that could be extracted from the Nazi horror against the Jews as a specific people.

A specialist of education among immigrants stressed the need to rethink the entire question of Holocaust education. She described a pre-2001 study done on Turkish responses to the Holocaust, specifying that many Turks thought in terms of a multi-cultural citizenship which transcended national borders and were thus not interested in fitting a German mould with its attendant commemorations. Some did perceive Holocaust awareness as an 'entrance ticket' to German life, but most transposed the Jewish horror into universal terms, thinking of it mainly as a crime against humanity. The specialist did say, however, that apparently some of the immigrant youths felt 'German' for the first time when visiting a concentration camp and seeing the glances that students from other countries threw at them as presumed descendants of the perpetrators. Participants then wondered how the second *intifada* and 9/11 might have changed the conclusions of the study. There was a general agreement within the group that if Turks in Germany had truly integrated the Holocaust in their socialization, then they should prove able to counter any rising Arab antisemitism in Germany. They should also counter any extreme left-wing distinction made between Jews as victims, and Israelis as 'perpetrators.' The group was however, careful in separating the German Holocaust debate from passions over the Middle East.

The group did not just dwell on the Holocaust chapter of the German past. The former 'Ossies' present stressed that Germans had also lost a piece of their own past identity with the loss of the eastern provinces now in Polish territory and that it was virtually impossible to either find their traces or to engage in a conversation with Poles over that spent chapter, where the question of 'responsibility' without 'guilt' was equally applicable for all younger generations. Similarly, Poles did not want Germans to interfere in their own debates over Jedwabne, even though the issue concerned everybody, Germans, Poles and Jews. While another East German voice stressed that those with a plurality of identities, for instance Poles who were also German, were often unable to come to terms with any past, and lived with shattered identities.

Another former 'Ossie' stressed that no reference to the past could be complete without taking Stalinism into account, not just in terms of domestic German history but also in terms of German involvement with the other countries of the Warsaw pact and of course with the former Soviet Union. The young Jewish voice with a Russian background felt that before East Germans contemplated their own role within the Warsaw Pact, they should first

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confront their own Holocaust past, which had been conveniently forgotten thanks to the regime's anti-fascist rhetoric.

The young politician from the Ruhr stressed the degree to which 'Auschwitz' did not make Germans more sensitive to other cultures and their own pasts, not even those of the Volga Germans who had immigrated from the former Soviet Union, but whose histories no one cared to learn. But he also stressed that many Turks were eligible for German citizenship but did not apply for it because they did not really want it, since a German passport came with a full load of German history, including Auschwitz.

The cultural activist from Berlin stressed that Germans were uniquely interested in 'their own Holocaust' and 'were very good at it', building impressive memorials in whose shadow even silly teen age boys behaved in a more serious manner. But the same Germans expressed little concern for ongoing genocides in Africa, for instance in the Darfur, or for other human suffering elsewhere. She even wondered whether an excessive 'philo-semitism' had not prevented Germans from looking at the Middle East in a more even-handed manner, to which the younger Jewish voice replied that Jews were the first to suffer from excessive 'philo-semitism', far more than the Arabs. As for linking the Holocaust to African atrocities, the older Jewish voice made the point that the Holocaust stood out with respect to the African horrors, not in terms of the suffering of the victims, but because it had been implemented at the highest decision-making levels in a highly developed society and had not been the work of child soldiers or violent masses.

A psychologist of Turkish origins changed the nature of the debate by stressing that the 'past' was not just the shared historical one, but, particularly in the Turkish immigrant community, a family/tribal one. Younger generations felt loyal above all to a family past and often knew or cared as little about Turkish history as German history. As a result they could only 'belong' and identify with a German past once their families felt integrated and not the other way around. This was his answer to a question raised as to why so many German-born Turks were still buried in Turkey rather than in their native German soil.

The group split over the long-term consequences of this complex link to the past. One pessimist stressed that Germany would remain a 'Swiss cheese country' full of holes for a long time and that identities (such as 'German', 'Jewish' or 'Turkish') would endure, the descendants of each group having to renegotiate their relations with one another and their specific memories in each future generation. An American voice stressed that there were other significant German 'holes' linked to the post-1968 violence and repression, as well as to the handling of 1989 (meaning, presumably, what happened to the 'Ossies').

The West German elder politician argued that one should not link the reference to Nazism to integration. For integration could only come about with a minimal shared *Leitkultur* which would take a long time to come about. He was also aware that integration implied changes both on the German side and on the side of the immigrant minorities. Above all, these changes had to be constructed in a positive manner. The reference to Nazism, instead, could only be based on an ongoing, totally negative narrative. Furthermore, he stressed, the time had come to move from the description of the horror to its interpretation. Otherwise, there would be no guarantee that the Holocaust would retain its 'universal singularity' over time. What counted was to refer to it sparingly and to ensure that similar horrors did not occur again.

The optimists argued, instead, that time would eventually solve many of these tensions. The historian was convinced that in two or three generations many of these divisive issues would have sorted themselves out. He felt that one could not make excessive demands on immigrants (and perhaps even on the old Germans themselves). In this he was seconded by the older Jewish voice, who agreed that integration at this point should be exclusively defined in legal rather than in cultural terms. What counted was the strengthening of a legal community of citizens. One could not wait for ten generations of cultural integration to produce such a community. The rest would come on its own and perhaps even *à la carte*. The judge of Turkish origins brought home this need for a legal com-

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munity by stressing that what counted most was for Germany to further open up its citizenship laws. She was frequently faced with distraught immigrants who had committed themselves to entering the German body politic, and who had been turned down for citizenship because they lacked some exceedingly technical prerequisite. In brief, there could be more integration if the country presented a more welcoming attitude.

The most important aspect of this extremely varied session was the manner in which it took place. First of all, Germans of all stripes were able to speak their minds and dialogue one with another (at times even in a brusque manner) on acutely sensitive topics, which would have previously been swept under the carpet in any politically correct exercise. Coming from totally different backgrounds and with often incompatible pasts, they proved able to engage in what I would call a 'pan-German' conversation. Secondly, in this round table the Holocaust was removed from its 'holy black pedestal' to become a living issue in a future-oriented German discussion. Ten years after the Walser-Bubis psychodrama, Germans of all stripes could discuss the perverse effects of the Holocaust's commemorative centrality without anyone accusing anyone else of any possible 'antisemitic' overtones. To me this was perhaps the most encouraging sign that Germany was slowly moving toward a positive future-oriented and eventually integrated society.

The state and German identity

Perhaps because the first two sessions of the round table had been so passionately intense and had touched upon the most serious topics in depth, the session devoted to the German state turned out to be far lighter in tone and more pragmatic in content than I had anticipated.

In the Swedish round table, I had assumed the participants would discuss at length the slow decline of the welfare state which I, as an outsider, considered to be the true pillar or 'glue' that held Swedish society together. It turned out in that round table, that Swedes, instead, had a very strong sense of a Hobbesian legal state, going back to the founding Wasa dynasty, so that the declining welfare state (whose decline was, of course, extremely relative compared to other countries) did not lie at the heart of their *res publica* discussions, which were far more centred on the law.

For the German round table, I had assumed that given the past, the discussions would centre on pondered analyses of the state and its functions in a rapidly evolving German society, but also given the extremely important philosophical and historical tradition of thinking on the regalian state.

Instead, the discussions centred almost exclusively on current politics and on the decline of the welfare state. One could palpably measure in this session the hole that Nazism had left in the nation, cutting it off effectively from its past. The protectionist welfare state thus became the identity 'glue' of the two Germanies that had rebuilt themselves out of the shambles of the past. Its slow weakening did not just constitute an economic and social problem, but above all an identity problem for a country that had no other state references to turn to and which was beginning (as shown in the first session) to feel the limits of constitutional patriotism.

Everyone agreed that the German welfare state was fraying, as elsewhere throughout Europe. But unlike the rest of Europe, this welfare state, whose roots lay in the paternalistic Prussian tradition and in the pioneering social reforms, pension plans and insurance systems inaugurated in the late 19th century by Bismarck, constituted the only viable and positive Ariadne thread leading back to the pre-Nazi German past. The decline of the German welfare state thus left Germans far more conceptually state 'orphaned' than the citizens of other European countries.

The West German conservative politician/thinker who launched the session, did reflect on the current decline of the Bonn Republic's federal system, which was rapidly being replaced by a far more centralized form of government in the Berlin Republic in which the executive had the real power and the parliament was marginalized. He attributed this growing centralization to Europe's need for strong national interlocutors, but also to the demands of globalization. The result was a 'consensus democracy' best incarnated in the current CDU and SPD coalition, in which all political issues

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were settled without any public debate and without any concrete results, since the state could not produce wealth and thus solve society's problems. The result was that Germany's younger generations wanted a return to the old 'father state' that would protect them from globalization and its dangers and protect them from the difficult task of taking charge of their own lives, which implied a renewed commitment to the work ethic.

It was therefore no accident that the 'father' metaphor with respect to the welfare state dominated the round table discussion with the participants debating, not unlike adult children, the current condition of their 'father'. Bismarck's 'father state' had been authoritarian and powerful, and to some extent his legacy was best found in postwar East Germany. The postwar West German 'father' was a silent provider. But now, in a united Germany, the father was no longer fulfilling his responsibilities.

For some, the father had simply abandoned the house and run away with the money (a direct reference to the tax evasion scandal of wealthy Germans hiding their money in 'foundations' in Lichtenstein, which made front-page headlines during the round table), in what could be called the privatization of public goods. To remedy against this 'father-thief', people had to dip into their savings to help their adult children. For others, the 'father' had left the family while still exerting disciplinary control over their lives in what could be called 'control without care.' For yet others, he had not run away but had simply become a totally inept father unable to perform his duties properly: regulating the wrong things and legislating in an absurd manner over who could benefit from social welfare.... even in terms of the size of the apartments, with the result that some people who needed help were forced to close off rooms in their house in order to qualify. Interestingly enough, these three interpretations all came from 'Ossie' participants who stressed that the current social welfare dysfunctions made them think of the old GDR in a kind of *déjà vu* syndrome.

The Berliners and the 'Wessies' were not far behind in their criticisms, stressing that the 'father' had simply gone away without leaving a forwarding address after having become totally unreliable: unable to pay pensions or to propose jobs. The father might be absent but people still expected him to send cheques to the abandoned family. Without them, Germans felt they were now skating on a 'thin ice' identity, since they had always defined their state in terms of available work and social protection. For one participant, maybe the 'father' was slowly being substituted by a 'mother' state, one prodding the birth of more children so as to ensure Germany had a future demographic base for its welfare payments.

One last metaphor, given by the politician who had started the session, was perhaps the most realistic. The German 'father' had neither run away nor become incompetent. He had simply become old and frail and was now confined to a wheelchair. One simply could no longer expect much from him. Unless one thought there could be some therapy to rejuvenate him, and the only one was to strike a new balance between the state and civil society, so as to put the frail man on a diet and put him back to work.

All participants agreed that drastic solutions were needed to cope with this failing father. One American voice suggested a shift of mental categories, for the time had come to cut the umbilical chord and to stand on one's own feet as 'adults', reapplying the Kennedy slogan to think what one could do for the state rather than what the state should do for its citizens. Others feared that Germany was embarked on a spiral of poverty, since those who received welfare payments produced children who would continue to be poor given the labour market. Other voices felt that the current welfare system was actually impeding immigrant integration, and that one perverse effect of the system was that wealthier members of society were simply withdrawing from the state, financing their own needs privately, and turning their backs on the original social contract. This could only lead to a privatization of the *res publica.* A psychologist stressed that not only the rich were withdrawing from the public sphere but also those who were poorer and on the margins, who felt they had experienced repeated injustices and humiliation. They too abandoned the contract, so that the malaise was more widespread than one could imagine.

One person wondered whether the failed state

might not be replaced with a growing reliance on communities. This would offer a specific identity as well as vital social services, while strengthening inter-generational links in a new form of 'living together', which would fill the German void of missed collective 'belonging.' Others feared that such communities, by guaranteeing welfare services, could easily trap people into closed religious or identity 'ghettoes.' Still others worried that people were so alienated from the state that they forgot it was supposed to incarnate 'all citizens' and that the state had to be recognized once more as the 'joint actor' of all Germans. A political scientist also stressed that countries had national cultures and that it would be impossible to turn Germany into the US with its communities and private social insurance, or into China with its tradition of collective social family responsibilities.

All seemed to agree that there was a need for a state that regulated less and when regulating, did it less rigidly. There was also agreement on the fact that Germans needed to become more self-reliant and that they should also (re)discover the virtues of voluntary work; some bemoaned the fact that fewer Germans were involved in associations for the public good, with the result that the poor and the elderly were becoming ever more lonely. Perhaps the time had come to envisage a *res publica* of voluntary work. One participant commented that the state was ever more distant from its citizens, and nowhere more so than with respect to immigrant women. If they were listened to, many of their families' problems would be grappled with more successfully, but immigrants remained 'objects' of discussions rather than joint actors.

The group as a whole agreed that the state could not be reformed or changed for the better, as long as a great power coalition remained in power, since it was self-paralyzing. One needed democratic debate and a true opposition that did not help those in power, in order to clarify the major national issues that Germany had to confront.

Beyond this political problem, however, what emerged most clearly was the degree to which Germans were still orphans of a significant state identity, now that their welfare 'father' state was in a wheelchair. This issue was only hinted at in the debate. One participant mentioned that the whole federal system needed to be overhauled, since there was no longer any 'value added' gain for the citizens from so many levels of power. Another stressed the need to strengthen local government, for that was the level at which major social decisions were taken. A third felt parliament should take back the power it had lost to the executive. But one had the impression that these individual suggestions formed part of a far larger need to rethink and re-programme the postwar *Bundesrepublik.* This need to fine tune or even revise nearly 60 year-old institutions will surely dominate national policies in the decade to come, as Germany learns to define itself as a country with a long past and an increasingly 'digested' Nazi period, and above all as a country which now has a long and decent postwar past. It could very well be that some of the 'patriotic' emotions best conveyed by the 'Ossies' at the round table will have to spread to the 'Wessies' as well, and even to the children of the immigrants for Germany to have a functioning and fully shared post-welfare nation state (perhaps along the lines of the Swedish state and obviously not along the lines of the French state).

Being a minority in Germany

This session covered Germany's immigrant problems, mainly with Turks, even though other groups such as the Volga Germans were peripherally mentioned. Virtually no reference was made to the older types of postwar immigrants, such as the Italians and the Yugoslavs, and there was a general consensus that Jews from the former Soviet Union were very different types of immigrants, both in educational and in cultural terms, so that they were not at all comparable. They did not go after the same jobs, and had a radically different integration process.

The session was started off by an academic psychologist of Turkish origins who stressed that Germans were under the impression that immigrant 'integration' had failed. This impression, in his view, was false. He stressed the fact that there were far greater differences inside each immigrant group than between a given group and the majority society in Germany. Integration was most difficult for uneducated persons coming from remote

agricultural villages with no city experience, and infinitely simpler for urban immigrants. Under the same 'Turkish' label one had Turks and Kurds with very different cultural visions and loyalties. He cited the fact that Kurds even rooted for the 'other' team when the famous football team from Istanbul, Galatasaray, played in the European Champions League.

Similarly, he stressed that even religious commitment was not homogeneous. Immigrants who believed in a 'loving God' were far more positive and adapted far more easily to the host society than those who believed in a 'God to be feared' that limited their interaction with 'infidels.' Finally the specialist stressed that immigration had immediately led to a leap in educational achievements for the second generation, who, typically, had eight to ten years of schooling, where their fathers had only had three to five, while the number of students of Turkish origin was regularly rising in the German university system.

This rather long-term optimistic scenario was not refuted by the group, which did, however, qualify it, particularly in the realm of education. Another educational specialist emphasized the degree to which there was a generation of Turkish 'lost children' who were automatically shunted off into technical schools with little promising future. Another immigrant voice with a Kurdish background stressed that integration had not failed, but it was a constant struggle in which the best outcomes were the result of self-help and self-organization, not of government structures. But she did agree that migration was an 'opportunity' not just for the immigrants, but also for society as a whole, if it would only adapt.

The conservative Western politician accepted that one could no longer consider secularization as a prerequisite for integration, but he hoped that Germany society as a whole, including its immigrants, would draw a line against the religious fanatics who propounded dangerous political theology, which had no role to play in a democracy. This was the only (and even then, highly veiled) reference to terrorist threats in Germany. This topic simply was not pursued, perhaps because it was deemed to be marginal in the German context, even thought the chief of the 9/11 terrorists had studied and lived for many years in Hamburg. On this count, the silence over terrorist cells resembled the similar silence of the British round table concerning the 7/7 British-born terrorists.

Those coming from East Germany with little or no experience of immigrants stressed that 'integration' did not only concern immigrants, but also those 'old' Germans who had fallen prey to social precariousness and for whom immigrants were guilty 'phantoms' as job stealers. This reading seemed confirmed by another Western voice who cited a statistic: 12 per cent of Germans had immigrant origins, but those of Turkish or Volga German origins, along with young 'Ossies', comprised the vast majority of prisoners.

A Berlin voice made the point that 'integration' was itself a pipe dream since it presupposed a homogeneous equal society into which the immigrant had to blend. Germany was instead an increasingly unequal and heterogeneous society in which immigrants could make their own niche, for there was no master matrix. To which the younger West German politician made the important point that Germany had just woken up to its immigrant problems, especially among the conservative CDU party, that, as little as ten years ago, was still speaking in terms of lump payments to immigrants so that they could return to their home countries. That illusion was gone, which meant politicians were finally grappling with the major social implications of immigrants of the second and third generation, and how they were fitting into German life. Politicians were now talking 'with' the immigrants rather than 'about' them. It was none too early, since, he added, in his home town of Essen, fully 38 per cent of school children came from an immigrant background; not all of them were poor, many were the children of educated refugees.

Other participants preferred to describe daily life. The consensus was that Turks had become totally accepted presences in German society, as proven by popular jokes, TV series and by a growing body of literature and films. The judge stressed that Chancellor Merkl's statement that she was the Chancellor of Germany's Turks as well, marked a conceptual milestone in immigrant integration, since they

were no longer considered as 'guest workers.' But the next step was to ensure that immigrants were far more visible in public life but also in state jobs. She pointed to the fact that there was not a single employee of immigrant origins, not even a typist, in the entire judicial system of Hanover. Only concerted political action could bring about such change.

One American voice wondered if it would not be better to speak of 'acculturation' rather than 'integration'. She then asked a question which stunned the round table. How long did it take for people to stop being considered as 'immigrants' and to be considered as German, or at least as hyphenated Germans? The judge with Turkish origins replied immediately that immigrants seemed to remain immigrants forever. She cited her own experience. Although she was born in Göttingen, and very much felt that was her hometown and childhood background, no one accepted her as 'German', but constantly referred to her Turkish heritage. Beyond her reply, no one could answer, which proved the degree to which Germany was indeed new to the immigrant question, and had to equip itself semantically, conceptually, culturally and politically to confront it in the years to come.

The younger Western politician stressed the degree to which it was difficult for Turks to state 'I am German', when postwar Germans themselves had felt mainly shame for being German. Furthermore, most Turks were also convinced that they would return 'home' to Turkey, so they did not even bother to try to become German. Now, instead, new generations of Germans felt at ease with their identity. New generations of Turks knew they would live their lives in Germany, so that the stage was finally set for confronting the immigrant problem. Another participant mentioned in passing that Germany still had to solve a semantic problem in expanding its citizenship to immigrants: the fact that there was no German word for 'citizen', but only the highly unsatisfactory one of '*Bürger*' with its 'bourgeois' social connotations. Both *Bürger* and *Mitbürger* were loaded words, since Jews objected to being called the latter, as though they were only ancillary or second-class citizens.

Interestingly, the issue of faith schools, as well as of religion did not come up in the debates spontaneously, whereas it had loomed large at the British, Swedish and even French round tables. Participants commented on this only after I noted its absence. Most felt that faith schools were not really weakening agents of the *res publica.* Their curriculum was controlled and compatible with German requirements, and any ideological overtones would not be accepted. Many even felt that private schools could be a stimulus for state education by reintroducing the principle of excellence and competition. If organized with parents, they could also be an asset in the strengthening of communities. According to an 'Ossie' voice, they even offered solutions in East Germany, where they replaced financially strapped public schools in largely underpopulated areas, thus avoiding the need for expensive and exhausting 'bussing' of students. Only one voice, while approving the principle of such private schools, asked what would happen to the 'residual' students left in the public schools. Did they not risk vegetating in an educational ghetto?

The real educational issue for the round table participants was the overall quality of German education. This was the only round table where the large European-wide study of high school achievement, referred to as the Pisa Study, was mentioned. Perhaps because the results, showing German mediocrity, clashed with the national belief that German schooling was excellent, whereas it had become too lax, and content-less. There was much discussion on how to improve it: by making compulsory school start earlier rather than at the late age of seven. This allowed one 'Ossie' participant to highlight the inefficiency of the German system, which had failed to integrate the very best aspects of the GDR, namely its pre-school system, which had been copied by Finland. As a result, the German authorities were now sending experts to study the Finnish system, when they had had the original in their own East German backyard. A West German voice felt Germany should tackle head-on the issues of school underachievers and overachievers, both of whom were sacrificed on the altar of 'normality'. Since each Land was responsible for its educational policies, the education crisis could be read as one more questioning of a too decentralized national setting.

What was most striking in this session was the

calm tone of the debates. There would be much work ahead, but none of the participants spoke in terms of unsolvable conflicts or imminent crises, either about the integration of Turks or of social cleavages. There was a consensus that the country had only begun to tackle these issues, and there was much rejoicing over this change of national spirit, combined with a feeling that it was still too early to judge the results. On this count Germany seemed blessed by its neophyte status which set it apart from eternally un-reformable France, muticulturally fatigued Britain, and a slightly more anguished Sweden, not to mention internally torn Poland.

Building the *res publica*

The final session of the round table, by concentrating on the future of the German *res publica,* came back to the very intense discussions of the very first two sessions, which had dealt with Germany's political identity and the state. This return to 'basics' revealed two very different, but not necessarily incompatible, approaches to Germany's *res publica:* the advocates of 'thin' formal values versus the advocates of a more 'thick' cultural belonging. These two camps were not based on any predictable ethnic, political or geographic differences. Since they cut across all identities, these 'thick' and 'thin' visions represented truly valid intellectual markers for effective political choices, precisely because they stood in a continuum and not on different sides of an ideological divide. The advocates of the 'thin' camp were perhaps more pessimistic than the advocates of the 'thick' camp. The former felt Germany still had to nail down and reiterate fundamental principles, whereas the latter, while acknowledging the importance of these principles, felt one could go beyond them to espouse more cultural and social expressions of identity.

The 'thin' camp reiterated their belief that the German *res publica* could only be consolidated by strengthening 'common rules.' A professor with an 'Ossie' background stressed that the legitimacy of the *res publica* would come through a total respect of procedures in the shared rules of the game. Only in this manner could civil society be harmoniously linked to the state. The key element in this debate was, according to her, the issue of citizenship, the fundamental building block of the *res publica*. Common 'values' could not constitute such a building block because different citizens could hold very different values, and there could be no Supreme Court of 'values.' She was open to the idea that common rules could evolve through time and even change in the future. What mattered was that procedure be respected.

The judge agreed, but took a more militant stand, stating that values such as freedom, equality and individual human rights were non-negotiable and had to be taught to all children at an early age. If necessary, they had to be imposed on recalcitrant members of different groups who did not share them. Fleshing out values was a secondary activity. Priority should be given to ensuring that principles be respected. Social cohesion, the 'thick' aspect of societies, could not be regulated in her view. The *res publica* should stick to its legal framework.

These positions were countered by those who felt that no country or society could be held together only by abstract and universal principles. As the member of a younger generation, the West German politician stressed that the country could not continue living with a legal framework that had been drafted in the mid-1950s and remained unchanged since then. Germany society in 2008 bore no relation to that of 1958. The Constitution should remain the backbone of the state and society but much else needed to be renegotiated. A living society needed 'flesh' and some kind of collective cultural and emotional 'glue.' He added that abstract values such as 'tolerance' were not sufficiently strong to create social cohesion. What was needed was a shared commitment toward new ideas for society as a whole, for common social projects, ideas that would bind people together beyond ethnic or religious identities. A cultural activist stressed that democracy needed to be 'refreshed'. Hybrid identities should be celebrated, and useful work elevated once again to an ideal, rather than an obligation.

The historian agreed that the *Grundgesezt* was not sufficient for national life. It could only ensure the protection of the individual against the state. The *res publica* should instead provide the bases for a 'communicative cohesion' based on citizen participation in projects that transcended their own

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private needs. In such a context, there might be a need to create some form of 'affirmative action' to ensure that people were integrated into the state. This 'affirmative action' was not meant to right social and economic imbalances as in the US, but to create citizens. He was seconded by the former 'Ossie' dissident who felt that the *res publica* had to be anchored in local level civic movements that would then feed the democratic space in a critical manner with innovative ideas and from there the institutions of the state. The logical endpoint of such civic initiatives had to be politics and the legally binding framework of the state, and not a society of NGOs, as many activists had believed in the 1990s.

A political issue linked to Berlin provoked much debate, as a case study of the limits of applied democracy. It referred to the Mayor's decision to schedule a non-binding referendum on what to do with the Nazi-built Templehof Airport, whose use as an airport he no longer felt was valid. Many members of the round table felt that a non-binding referendum constituted a democratic breach which made a mockery of citizens' wills. Others felt the mayor was perfectly entitled to launch such a consultative non-binding referendum because he had the political legitimacy with which to decide the fate of the airport without needing to comply with the referendum. The issue pitted the proponents of civil society against those of state politics.

Another issue that was raised was linked to the notion of collective rights. The Jewish voice with Russian roots made a plea for a *res publica* which would formally and legally respect group identities and group rights. He argued on behalf of the 'dignity of minorities' and their right to speak from a vantage point of collective injustice or suffering. Their collective sensitivities should be respected. The Constitution guaranteed the positive freedom of speech. One should now enforce the negative right to stop hate speech, so that this curbing of free speech would protect not just Jews, but all minorities. Another participant mentioned the need to think in collective terms of the elderly. The cultural activist from Berlin agreed that Germany was governed by too many 'white middle-aged men', and needed far more visible alternative voices.

The other participants responded somewhat warily to this notion of collective rights. They felt that freedom of speech warranted the greater protection. On this count, former 'Ossie' voices, with an experience of totalitarian collective definitions, were worried about the notion of collective rights and of formally established identities. They feared such labels might be placed on people who might want to define themselves differently, especially in the long run. Others rebutted the notion that Germany was run by white middle-aged men, arguing that things were changing rapidly on that front, but that new faces were bound to appear more slowly in Germany, since the administration, unlike in the United States, did not change with every new electoral victory.

The older Western politician stressed that German democracy was structured precisely, in the wake of Nazism, to protect and give particular weight to non-extremist minority voices. There was no need for minorities to be over-represented. If properly channelled, they could play an important role in a political system whose constitutional backbone was still perfectly functional, but which could and should evolve to encompass ever greater numbers of citizens.

The round table ended with participants giving their opinion on whether they thought Germany's time line was moving 'upward' or 'downward' with respect to the country's social and political problems. Despite their very different backgrounds, the vast majority of the participants felt the timeline was moving 'upward.' They were optimistic, or at least serene in their belief that Germany would be able to meet the *res publica* challenges ahead. The advocates of both 'Thin' and 'Thick' belonging agreed that the legal framework of the country was sound. They also agreed that Germany had finally come to accept its status as a country of immigrants, just when the immigrants themselves had accepted the fact that they were staying. This combined entry into the 'reality principle' was finally paving the road toward meaningful dialogue.

They also concurred that there were more elements that united all types of Germans than separated them. Politically, it was important to strengthen citizen initiatives and to think collectively about the terms of a greater social cohesion at the local

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level far from abstract and often too 'consensual' national politics. Culturally, it was important to stress the degree to which all identities (whether in the majority or within the minorities) were far from homogeneous and therefore open to outside influences and to the idea of multiple loyalties. Hence the importance of keeping identity lines between immigrants and 'old' Germans 'blurred' rather than cast in cement. Geographically, the *res publica* had to meet the needs of all Germans, not just those in the minority, but also those in the former East Germany as well as those who were conservative and not particularly favourable to change. Finally, socially, the *res publica* had to reopen the channels of social mobility, thus ensuring that no one be left behind in a society where jobs no longer guaranteed autonomy and status.

The tasks were no more immense than anywhere else in Europe, but what made the German round table stand out was the openness and earnestness of the debates. Its participants considered their country as a relative neophyte in the arduous task of creating an inclusive society with shared values, in brief, a *res publica* truly common to all. The spontaneity and directness of their discussions was the best proof that Germany had indeed reached the moment when it could confront the past, rethink the present and plunge into the future with a newly-found common language, one that could even discuss the Holocaust in internal German terms, without the need to look for external approval. The round table was in itself the perfect manifestation of this newly found confidence in Germany as a vibrant democratic laboratory ready to confront openly, modestly and creatively the national challenges before it.

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March 2008

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