

## Europe: How far have we come?

### Bertrand Benoit and John F. Jungclaussen debate with the Young Königswinter Alumni and display how varying viewpoints can lead to common conclusions

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In the pleasant surroundings of the Viennese-style *Café Einstein* the Young Königswinter Alumni came together to discuss, once more, 'Europe': What has been achieved and what might happen in the future?

Bertrand Benoit, Berlin bureau chief of the *Financial Times*, and John F. Jungclaussen, a correspondent of *Die Zeit* in London, joined together to offer their insight into these multi-faceted questions. Given the international perspectives of both guests, they inevitably focussed not only on the politics of the European Union but also considered Europe's significance as a social and cultural space, in keeping with the international and multidisciplinary ethos of the Young Königswinter network.

The discussion started off with both speakers giving a short statement of their own thoughts on the status and future development of the European Union. For M. Benoit the vital question is the 'finality' of Europe, not so much in the sense of borders but rather in terms of the constitutional shape Europe might take. The European idea has always stood somewhere between a national and a federal level. Yet the federalist project was

dealt a death blow by two major events in recent years.



As M. Benoit argued, the rejection of the European Constitution and the decision by Messrs. Schröder and Chirac to weaken the Euro Stability Pact firmly re-established the supremacy of national influence over the supra-national framework.

*Discussing Europe: Young Königswinter alumni at Berlin's Café Einstein. At the table head: Ben Hutchinson (centre), Bertrand Benoit (left), John F. Jungclaussen (right)*

The perceived failure of the federalist project also prompted reflection on the successes of the European Union. For M. Benoit these are not to be underestimated, and he gave the example of the positive influence of the EU Commission on European economies in lifting trade and movement barriers. The EU not only creates consensus on difficult topics but also helps to implement these solutions through its institutions. Unfortunately, national politicians have all too often blamed these institutions for unpopular reforms.

M. Benoit thus concluded that the death of the federalist project did not actually matter that much, since it continues through the various EU institutions and reforms, as well as through the Euro.

In answering, if not countering that, Herr Jungclaussen tried to explain why the British have not yet signed up to the EU in the same emotional way that the Germans and French have. It seems that rather than being hostile to Europe, the Brits are simply not that interested.

To answer the question as to why the British are so different to continental Europeans, Herr Jungclaussen referred to a story of the late Queen Victoria. In 1869 the Queen asked Baron Haussmann, after he had remodelled Paris, to make London the grandest city in Europe. He began his endeavour with the eviction of numerous homeowners in order to make space for the grand boulevards and buildings that he planned. As Herr Jungclaussen stated, however, this would have been the start of a revolution, as it would have violated the fundamental pillars of British society – privacy and property, living life without an interfering state. An Englishman's home is his castle!

This very different evolution of British society, compared to continental European societies, partly explains the distance Britain keeps to the EU. Delving further into the original differences, Herr Jungclaussen reminded us that continental Europe is based on the Napoleonic Code and the strong role of the state, which increased in most of Europe in response to the devastation of World War II. Neither of these foundations are similar to British developments and do not appeal to the British mentality.

For Britain the EU is and was first and foremost an economic project. It never joined the European debate with any big visions of its own. This pattern is now partially changing as issues such as climate change, immigration, and terrorism cannot be resolved unilaterally. Herr Jungclaussen concluded that although we should not expect too much too soon from Britain vis-à-vis the EU, in small steps it might yet become more interested in co-operating with the EU on policy issues.

Alumnus Ben Hutchinson moderated the open discussion that followed, which started with a lively debate of this politics of small steps. One alumna compared this functional argument with the opening of Pandora's Box, arguing that once you start with monetary policy you end up with the Euro. It was suggested moreover that the British parliament should not ratify the new European treaty, because it is simply the constitution revamped. Herr Jungclaussen tried to balance these arguments by explaining that it would be highly unlikely to see the Euro being implemented in Britain – yet on the other hand, he could envisage the closer co-operation and involvement of Britain in the EU. Even though no radical changes in their attitude towards the EU could be expected, common global challenges were inevitably pushing Britain closer to the continent.

The German from London closed in agreement with the Frenchman from Berlin that the European project is alive and kicking, and that we might see more of a Europe operating 'at two speeds': a core of countries setting the pace of integration while individual countries like Britain co-operate on a case by case status.