

the US: "What do Americans think?" Europeans often hope for American approval, or fear its wrath. Yet I invariably disappoint them. Most Americans, I am forced to admit, have no idea what the EU is and what it does. Even among politicians and policymakers, only a tiny handful have a coherent and informed view of how it functions.

In part this reflects the celebrated ignorance of Americans about international affairs, and their tendency, when they do pay attention, to focus almost entirely on military matters, where the EU is marginal. Yet a more important cause of American ignorance is the utter lack of experience with multilateral cooperation of the breadth and depth found in Europe—with its common court, parliament and regulators. Americans do not simply misunderstand European integration; they literally cannot imagine it.

So Americans ignore Brussels until a concern of apparent importance to their interests arises: a shift in arms export policy to China, a proposal for defence co-operation, a chance to plead the Turkish case or a WTO dispute in agriculture or aircraft production. A short flurry of commentary arises, the issue is dispatched, and Americans return to blissful ignorance.

Sovereignists at bay

To be sure, a few on the right of US politics view Europe as a serious threat. Some fear formation of a military superpower independent of, even hostile to, America. A year ago, some publicly called on the US to protect Nato by opposing the EU constitution, rejecting European integration, and encouraging British withdrawal. Yet today such views are passé in Washington. With the debacle in Iraq, policymakers are beginning to recognise the true costs of unilateralism. With Condoleezza Rice and Robert Zoellick now firmly controlling the state department, President Bush's trip to Europe in May, during which he became the first US president to visit the EU institutions, sent an old-fashioned signal of support for European integration.

The EU is at its best when it is at its most boring—something Tony Blair has forgotten. And why Americans can't even imagine how Europe works

BY ANDREW MORAVCSIK

An end of constitutional confusion

The first response of the good Europeans in Brussels to the death of the constitutional treaty was to go into denial. The second was to go on vacation. Now, with deep tans and cooler heads, they have returned to Brussels, where they find that the EU is still there, working well, but with a lot that needs to be done. After years wasted on constitutional debate, the EU is back to doing what it does best: solving concrete problems. Thought is being given to how the Turkish problem can be finessed so as to keep Balkan enlargement on the rails. Proposals to strengthen homeland security are being developed. A budgetary settlement will have to be reached. And dozens of everyday regulatory issues are starting to grind forward. Visionary leadership and *grand projets* are blessedly absent.

Blair isn't boring enough

Only one leader seems not to have got the message. Ironically, it is the arch-pragmatist: Tony Blair. His government still seems intent on using the current British presidency as a lobbying exercise for continental economic reform. Of course Blair is right, most notably in his flashy June speech to the European parliament, that economic reform in the face of globalisation is *the* issue facing Europe today. And perhaps he is justified in lauding the successes of the British social model. But the most important reforms—reforms to labour markets and the varied European social models—lie outside EU competence. The real work must thus be done by national leaders, and having a representative of "Anglo-Saxon capitalism" harangue them hardly makes tough political choices more palatable. The EU works best when it is at its most boring. In the new post-constitutional Europe, more than ever, no news is good news.

American view of Brussels

When something happens in Brussels—a constitution, a crisis or just an everyday directive—Europeans regularly ask me, a professional Brussels-watcher in

Noisier and more numerous are those conservatives who see Europe as a bastion of socialism and invasive regulation. American businessmen tend to view European economic growth rates with contempt, and are convinced that America knows better. (Never mind that in fact, nearly all the divergence reflects population growth and differences in working hours—with Europeans voluntarily remunerated for their higher productivity in the form of leisure.) Diehard "sovereignists," centred in the American Enterprise Institute and elsewhere, go further. They see the EU's support for multilateralism as a threat to US independence and democracy, in part simply because it is a form of international law, and in part because it symbolises opposition to their libertarian dream of a return to a pre-New Deal laissez-faire America free of federal welfare programmes, liberal judges and rights talk.

Fear of united socialist Europe wielding international law to undermine the American constitution is wacky, even delusional. One must never forget, however, that American conservatives receive an unhealthy portion of their information about the EU from Tory Eurosceptics and their journalistic allies. Libertarians avidly ingest tales of metric martyrs and 48-hour weeks—without reflecting that their informants comprise only a faction of an unelectable minority party in a country itself part of a perpetual minority in Europe. ■



"Let me through! I've got a proper camera!"