

## WHAT NEXT FOR EUROPE?

Interview with **Charles Ricq**, Emeritus Professor of the University of Geneva

**O**n the occasion of this edition focusing on the revival of regionalist movements and the Scottish referendum, we met an eminent expert on regional questions, Emeritus Professor of the University of Geneva, Charles Ricq. Professor Ricq is an adviser to the Council of Europe and the European Commission. He is also secretary-general of the European Centre for Observation of the Regions (COEUR) in Geneva. In the course of the interview he stressed that it was important to speak not of a Europe of regions but of a Europe with regions. This is the same message as that put across in the recent report by Luc Van den Brande, former president of the Committee of the Regions, on European Multilevel Governance, on the basis of the subsidiarity principle, which was reaffirmed in the Treaty of Lisbon.

**Professor, you are the director of the European Centre for Observation of the Regions, set up by Denis de Rougemont in 1974. For some years now we have been witnessing a revival of regionalism. And yet the region remains a diverse political entity. Could you begin by defining a region?**

The diversity and complexity of the regional phenomenon in Europe makes it necessary to use an interdisciplinary definition. The first definition comes from public law. Both the Council of Europe, with its 47 Member States, and the European Union, with its 28 Member States, define European regions as the political and/or administrative level immediately below that of the State.

To this should be added various economic, sociological and philosophical approaches. I will quote only one of these, which takes account of various parameters: a region is made up of a territorial area marked, in way specific to it, by geography, history, economics and sustainable development and, now, by an ever greater demographic mix, by religion – the old principle *cuius regio, eius religio* – and by cultural aspects in the broad sense, embracing language and identity.

Every region can assign priority or greater importance to a given parameter, without losing sight of what my intellectual mentor, Denis de Rougemont, used to say: "What counts for the regions is not size but powers".

**Does the new need for a regional identity reflect our loss of bearings, a kind of search for a tangible and comprehensible**

**homeland, proximity in a complex and globalised world?**

In an era of globalisation, particularly in its economic and financial but also social aspects, each individual, in a kind of dialectical process, seeks for bearings, geographical, historical, political and cultural landmarks, as a basis for his personal and collective identity and in order to map out a territory to which he belongs. I would, however, immediately add that the identity phenomenon, which moulds each of us and each of our regions, is always situated in time, a process constantly in motion, and I would break it down into three phases: "memory identity", based on a personal or collective past; "action identity", for facing up to the socio-economic, political and cultural changes of our times; and finally "projection identity", which reflects the medium and long-term projects which any individual or collective entity devises for the future.

**In what way are the regional autonomy or secessionist movements that we have seen recently in Scotland and Catalonia different from those observed in the 1970s and 1980s?**

Reflecting on regional autonomy requires a clear distinction to be made between regionalisation and regionalism, which many writers and politicians blithely confuse. While regionalisation involves the political and/or administrative techniques which every State uses for its current or future territorial organisation – often assigning greater weight to economic parameters – regionalism, in sociological terms, means a territorial entity developing an awareness of what it was, is and would

like to be. Regionalism can therefore give rise to political movements (rather than political parties) often calling for more autonomy, and sometimes it leads to even greater forms of self-affirmation, when regionalism becomes nationalism.

Every democratic State, whatever its political system, must attempt to strike a successful balance between the two phenomena of regionalisation and regionalism. I am, for example, curious to see what transpires in the region of Alsace in the near future. Personally, in order to analyse the regional phenomenon in Europe in greater depth, I think it is essential to analyse the separatist phenomenon by type: this can range from moderation to violent extremism. As an example of this I would cite the emergence of a new federal state in Switzerland, the new Swiss canton of Jura, established in January 1978, which was democratically accepted by the whole Swiss people and the 25 other cantons.

**Is it possible to sketch an outline of regionalisation in Europe?**

Regional autonomy also requires serious analysis, as it has many forms, all of which to a greater or lesser extent are calling for new powers, whether economic, social, fiscal, cultural or legislative. To put this in highly formal terms, four main political systems have developed in Europe over the course of history, all of them democratic I would stress: centralised States, decentralised States, where regions have only regulatory powers, regionalised States, where they have legislative powers, and federal States, where the regions may even have exclusive powers alongside powers delegated by, or shared with, central government.



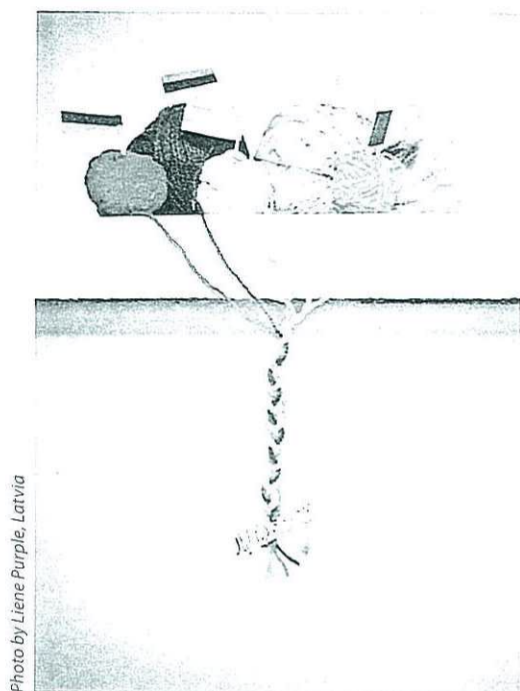


Photo by Liene Purple, Larvia

**What can we say about the calls for independence currently emanating from places such as Scotland, Catalonia or Dutch-speaking Belgium, as well as from some border regions?**

Other than meeting or restoring these claims, the only thing states can do – if they have not already done so – is to embark on a lengthy process of federalisation, granting their regions more and more powers. The United Kingdom is an interesting case: although the very word “federalism” is anathema to the British state, the fact that it is granting broader responsibilities – even tax powers – to Scotland shows that this same state is shifting towards a process of federalisation. Then again, I would point out that even in federal states, a real exchange either exists or is developing between centralising and decentralising forces in those countries.

**What difference is there between the process of federalisation in the Member States and the federalisation of the European Union, which seems to be evolving towards a “federal structure”?**

Let’s talk about European integration which also uses, and will increasingly use, what Jacques Delors called “federal structures” – in other words, launching protracted and complex federalisation processes in order to lay more solid political, economic, social and cultural foundations for Europe. We might also look back to Winston Churchill’s Zurich speech in 1947 about the “United States of Europe”.

To those EU states that still cling to the “inter-governmental method”, spurning the “Community method”, we could point out that – and this simply common sense – that “shared sovereignty” does not mean loss of sovereignty. On the contrary,

in Europe it facilitates the generation of real synergy focusing on its economic integration, its social model, cultural diversity, and land-use planning by means of the underlying principles that mark this Europe of ours: democracy, the rule of law, solidarity, spiritual values, economic, social and territorial cohesion, and subsidiarity

For both the states and the regions of the European Union, all these basic principles demonstrate that solidarity is impossible without interdependence (as in the case of migration), and that neither can there be autonomy without interdependence (for example, fiscal transfers between regions). Subsidiarity cannot exist in the absence of solidarity.

**Has the financial crisis intensified the transformation of regionalist movements and their nationalist offshoots by means of a more economic and social approach, highlighting the rift between “South” and “North”, between “poor” and “rich” regions?**

I do not believe that these regionalist movements can be explained first and foremost by the financial crisis; each region, just like each state, has experienced this in its own way since September 2008 (the Lehmann Brothers collapse). Regional-

ist movements are primarily grounded in identity-based, cultural or indeed linguistic demands, which may of course overlay socio-economic inequalities that cause resentment. Perhaps we should, for example, aspire to a European Union that encourages conflict-free bilingualism or multilingualism everywhere, while of course respecting national and/or regional languages. The threefold cohesion – economic, social and territorial – that the Treaty of Lisbon called for in 2009 would, in the more or less long term, effectively help to strike a new balance across European territory. The condition is that adequate structural funds, through the 2020 strategy for example, should not be partially called into question all the time.

**Could regionalisation become a fresh source of instability for the European Union?**

As I am unshakably optimistic about European integration in the long term, I think it would be premature to claim that new “state-regions” or “region-states” would disrupt the European venture. Both Scotland and Catalonia sometimes even look more European than the states to which they belong! But I would rather use the pleasing image

of a mosaic – like the one in Ravenna – to define Europe. Europe’s unity and diversity constitute a delicate mosaic. But its pattern and even more its design for the future – the most important aspect – must be constantly enhanced by each new element, nation-state or region-state. The latter would then act as a kind of “internal enlargement” of the European Union.

At this point, we could apply two concepts and practices derived from demographic, economic, political and sociological science – in other words, “mixing” and “meshing”, both of which show how Europe is at the same time one and diverse, both culturally and economically. So, I have no fear of what some describe as Europe splintering – after all, you don’t look at a mosaic’s pieces one-by-one, however different they are, but as part of the overall pattern.

**How can we build a Europe that is united in its diversity?**

I would like to finish by emphasising, as Denis de Rougemont did, that we should speak in terms not of a “Europe of the regions”, but of Europe “with the regions”. Such is the message that the Committee of the Regions’ recent report on multilevel governance in Europe has voiced – on the basis of subsidiarity, as reaffirmed in the Treaty of Lisbon. For my part, I would supplement the vertical level of governance for distributing powers between European institutions, states and regions, with a horizontal level as part of a dialectical movement – in other words, “multi-actor governance” which, in a given region, would bind together all the actors of genuine regional governance – even cross-border governance – involving elected representatives, socio-economic or cultural office holders, and civil society. I would like to see the Committee of the Regions rapidly put forward a fully-fledged charter for regional governance – the Council of Europe having “set aside” the Charter of Local Self-Government in 2008. I would again emphasise that the regions are at the heart of Europe and Europe is at the heart of the regions.

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**Since studying philosophy, economics and sociology (in Paris, Rome and Brussels), Charles Ricq, professor emeritus at the University of Geneva, has dedicated his life to applying Denis de Rougemont’s vision to his research and teaching on European integration, institutions, economics, territory, frontiers, identity and culture, in particular in its border regions. He is a scientific adviser to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and the European Commission in Brussels. He is also secretary-general of the Centre d’Observation Européen des Régions (European Observatory of the Regions) in Geneva.**