

Europe: histoire(s) de(s) crises (Crises in Europe: history and reflections) round table (Paris, 22 October 2008) – introductory text

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To mark the publication of the Special File on 'French accounts of the European integration process', the *Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe* (Virtual Resource Centre for Knowledge about Europe - CVCE, Luxembourg) joined forces with the Maison de l'Europe in Paris on 22 October 2008 to organise a round table entitled *Europe: histoire(s) de(s) crises* (Crises in Europe: history and reflections).

The history of Europe has been punctuated by crises, or at the very least, critical moments. After the Irish 'No' to the Treaty of Lisbon, it once again finds itself in a difficult situation. But how can we not believe that Europe will recover in the same way that it has always overcome the numerous crises that have marked the European integration process? These crises may have been institutional - from the failure of the European Defence Community in 1954 to the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty - or caused by monetary issues, such as the recurring tensions during financial negotiations and the divisions over foreign policy. Further examples that might be cited are the crisis surrounding the growth of a European Union whose enlargement has made it the victim of its own success, the identity crises in some Member States, and lastly the relational crisis between the Union and its citizens.

These crises have been diverse in nature, but they have one element in common, namely that they have often been a source of disagreement or deadlock that has hindered the European integration process. How were these crises perceived at the time? How were they addressed and finally resolved? Did they leave their mark? Did they actually lead to fresh impetus and subsequent success? Finally, are European crises not an integral part of the shared emotional heritage that links the Member States of the European Union, as it does every human community?

Taking examples from the past 50 years, first-hand witnesses, politicians, historians and journalists addressed these questions and gave us their views. The history of Europe was considered alongside the personal stories and accounts of those who have contributed to the European integration process as these crises have unfolded, with the aim of drawing lessons that can be applied during the current crises and in the future.

Alongside Nicolas Schmit, Luxembourg Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration, Catherine Lalumière (President of the Maison de l'Europe, Paris), Georges Berthoin (former Head of the Private Office of Jean Monnet and former representative of the European Communities to London), Sylvie Goulard (President of the European Movement France), Hervé Bribosia (Head of Research at the CVCE), Paul Collowald (former journalist and spokesman at the European Commission) and Sylvain Schirmann (Director of the Institute of Political Studies, Strasbourg) tried to find answers to a number of questions during a debate chaired by Quentin Dickinson, Director for European Affairs at Radio-France, Brussels.

This round table was divided into three themes, each introduced by a short video montage including extracts from the interviews conducted for the Special File on 'French accounts of the European integration process'.

- First panel: Crises in the Union since it was established (1989–2008)
- Second panel: Past crises (1950–1989)
- Third panel: Crises in the future

Initial reflections on the crisis, taking the term in its broadest sense, experienced by the EU since it was established (first panel) provided a context in which to consider past crises (second panel), before lessons were drawn regarding the prevention and management of crises in the future (third panel).

Following the round table, the debate was opened up to the audience.