

LETTER FROM AMERICA

My dear Debray,

THE DEED IS DONE! I am a US citizen.¹ You'll be pleased to hear that I passed the language and history tests with flying colours and without impugning the reputations of our ambassador's predecessors here in Washington. The vow of allegiance was sworn in the somewhat sombre surroundings of the Immigration Office; we stood before the Star-Spangled Banner, hand on heart. Knowing me as you do, however, you will understand that this was no act of petty opportunism on my part, but prelude to a vaster scheme.

Naturally, I don't expect to convince you; but who could not attempt to persuade his oldest friend of a project which, he fears, may prove the only safeguard—however temporary—of the civilization that has formed them both? In 212 AD the Emperor Caracalla, mindful of the barbarian hordes at his borders and the growing costs of military expenditure, took the revolutionary step of declaring every freeman of the Roman Empire—from the banks of the Tigris to the Atlantic Ocean—a citizen of Rome. In a trice, the faltering superpower was reinforced by millions of new taxpayers, talents and recruits. The edifice endured for another two hundred years.

Today, does not Western civilization—in the hands of a mere 15 per cent of the world's population and, thanks to globalization, as visible to the other 85 per cent as the contents of a Hermès shop-window in the Place Saint-Denis—demand a similarly unified power? Shared goals unite Europe and the US. We all seek to deregulate our economies, democratize our hinterlands, promote human rights. But our wealth attracts resentment and around us there surges a rising tide of the hungry and the dispossessed. Huntington's homilies on the clash of civilizations ignore the crucial fact that the world is also divided into states. The

point, for any man of action, is to ensure that ideologies and institutions coincide. Would there be an Islam today, if an Umayyad and then an Abbasid *imperium* had not arisen within decades of Mohammed's death? If Damascus and Baghdad had not been political, as well as religious, capitals? Would we have a Christianity had there not been a Christendom, Carolingian or Byzantine, to hold back Arab incursions? A Mount Athos, without the ramparts of Constantinople? Cistercians, without a Frankish chivalry, Jesuits, without a Charles V?

Today, our civilization demands its own encompassing political institution: the United States of the West. The European response to September 11—'Nous sommes tous américains!'—and surge of unanimity, from *L'Humanité* to the *Figaro*, was heartwarming in its way. But shared sentiments without unity of command are good for nothing but after-dinner speeches. Our opinion-makers are satisfied with so little—their indifference to the connexion between words and facts never ceases to astonish me. Less poetry, please, and more logic! Kennedy's *Ich bin ein Berliner* was a strategy, not a spasm of emotion. A new century lies before us. What role will Europe settle for in America's march across Asia—staffing a first-aid post on the Afghan frontier? Patrolling the Gulf in a paddle-boat? Providing after-sales service for the Middle East? My friend, the only way to escape from protectorate status is to move up from Zone Two into Zone One. Is it just, is it democratic, that the inhabitants of the fifty states alone should vote for the American president, whose thumbs-down determines the fate not just of a couple of gladiators but of millions of lives?

The task, admittedly, would be easier if our new Augustus, relaxing on Air Force One, would scribble his reflections in French or German, as Marcus Aurelius in Greek. But the resemblance between the pioneers of the Tiber and the apprentices of the Potomac is striking: on both sides, one finds the same pragmatic refusal of abstraction, historical optimism, inaptitude for melancholy; chicanery everywhere, from the Operations Room to the marriage bed. Both offer a welcome for strangers and a respect for all gods. In both, the conquered—Latinos, Japanese—are granted citizens' rights.

The first step is to instruct our international-law specialists to draw up a conversion plan, transforming a region of common values into

¹ Extracted and adapted from *L'Édit de Caracalla ou plaidoyer pour des États-Unis d'Occident*, Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard 2002. Translated by John Howe.

one of shared sovereignty. The position of Puerto Rico—*estado libre asociado*—may point the way for our new constitutional model. Territorial discontinuity will be no problem: think of Hawaii, let alone Martinique or Guadeloupe. The Atlantic will be to the USW as the Mediterranean to Rome—*mare nostrum*. Paris and Los Angeles are equidistant from the Hudson. What use the irrational multiplication of foreign ministries, intelligence services, surveillance satellites, in pursuit of an identical set of interests? Why so many heads, for a single geo-strategic continuum?

By this stage, my dear Régis, you will have grasped the scale of what lies ahead. Here, perhaps, my long years of service to the French State may be of use in drafting an advisory brief for the advocates of both sides. How, first of all, should Europe's spokesmen—one of those rotating chairmen, Belgian, Italian or Dutch, who replace each other every six months at the pinnacle of the EU—put the case for the USW, if granted an audience in the Oval Office? I would suggest six basic points.

1. Your superpower is no empty boast, Mr President, but your tasks are disproportionate to your capacities. You are already overextended. You cannot cover the planet, from the Kuriles to Panama, the Cape of Good Hope to the Taiwan Strait, the Balkans to Tierra del Fuego, all by yourself. See how many danger zones already escape your grasp—North Korea still unsubdued, the President of Afghanistan unable to leave his capital. Rubber dinghies blast holes in your warships in the Gulf. Latin America descends into chaos. US businessmen can scarcely travel abroad without threat of kidnapping or worse.

Through their ballooning birthrates, the armies of the least dependable nations, the underdeveloped ones, will become ever more dangerous; those of the whites, though better equipped, will run short of recruits and already lack enthusiasm for the sacrifice. Your population's attachment to the things of this world—so important in sustaining our mutual quality of life—is not a problem as long as superior firepower allows you to dominate from 30,000 feet. But one day nuclear proliferation will qualify that advantage. A people's willingness to die for their country remains their rulers' strongest card. NATO's Article Five commanded universal support in the immediate aftermath of September 11 but enthusiasm, you will have noticed, has since been on the wane. Our electorates, too, can read a map and do their sums. Confucius plus Allah equals

70 per cent of oil reserves and nearly two-thirds of the global population. China is with you now; but if in future it was to see its interests in a Sino-Pakistan-Saudi axis, Europe might feel its centre of gravity start to shift. The balance between our two continents is changing. One day, your troops will have to step down into the mud. United in one great transatlantic federation, however, our masses will be freshly inspired to fight alongside—or even in advance of—their new compatriots.

2. Consider the demographics. In 1900, the West had a third of the world's population and, through its colonial system and the illiteracy of its subject peoples, dominated half the globe. In 2025, Westerners will be a mere 10 per cent, and our literacy rates are on the decline. Mastery of advanced technologies will slip from our hands as China and India forge ahead in software developments. Grouping ourselves into a single Federation might not end our demographic stagnation, but it would at least temper one flow of immigrants with another. The Latino culture of your Hispanic newcomers is under-represented in northern-dominated Europe—to our detriment. Christianity's centre of gravity has moved south. In 1939 the three biggest Christian countries were Germany, Italy and France; today they are Mexico, the Philippines and Brazil. You are closer and more engaged with them than we are, and can help refresh our religious roots. On the other hand, with our millions of North Africans and Turks, we know your enemies better than you do. Your ideas are too simple for the complexities of an Islamic world with which you lack common frontiers and shared memories, good or bad. Hence your clumsy counter-offensives, ill-matched alliances, crude analysis.

You will bring your millions of Latinos into the United States of the West, and we our Muslims. Think how much more credible our leaders will be as planetary spokesmen, once our common state is a genuinely representative microcosm of the human mosaic, an unequalled setting for inter-cultural exchange. More important still, Mr President, the incorporation of Europe will mean a WASP replenishment of your population on a massive scale. The demographic effect of two or three hundred million ethnic Europeans, fair-skinned descendants of your Pilgrim Fathers, is a factor you will not want to ignore.

3. The economic argument is equally compelling. Consider the advantages of encompassing nearly 60 per cent of world GDP within one sovereign state. There will be no more anxieties about foreign investors' willingness to sustain your current-account deficit. They will have no choice. In uniting our economies, we will not merely put an end to bickerings over steel, bananas and hormone-rich beef. Each will offer the other a crucial strategic correction. What could better restore the shaken faith of your investors in their post-Enron corporate culture than the solidity and long-standing relationships of our Rhenish model? And what better way to invigorate our stagnating industries than the shock therapy of Texas or Manhattan? Working together, Big Government and Big Business will forge the optimized superhighway of the future. We will discreetly remind you of the virtues of social dialogue, factory committees and employment policies; you will point out the value of mergers and staff reductions. The great West of the future, our common ideal, will be productivity plus redistribution. Can you achieve it alone, Mr President?

4. Culture, I know, is not your first concern; I will be brief. Within the USW, your entertainment industry will no longer be the target of our envious professionals (though they may mourn the transformation of that Moloch of pixels and celluloid which it gives them so much pleasure to abhor). Our contributions in this field will give you a quality label to silence any such carping. Globalization will no longer be disparaged as Americanization. Hamburger plus chateaubriand, soap opera plus Visconti, Coca-Cola plus Château Pétrus, Disneyland plus the Louvre—the complement of quantity plus quality will enable the USW to conquer on two fronts: the right to happiness plus spiritual elevation. Mass audiences and cultural refinement, big budgets and experimental art—who then will dare to talk about dumbing down, wall-to-wall vulgarity, brain candy? Our common culture will no longer be synonymous with materialism and exhibitionism—the products of your Military–Industrial–Entertainment Complex—but with culture *tout court*, from top to bottom of the range. Alone, you are omnipresent. Together, we will be irreproachable. (I would add that in our intellectual and artistic circles, especially in France and Italy, you will find an enthusiasm for the star-spangled banner that your campuses might envy.)

5. The state of your federal institutions, Mr President, leaves much to be desired. You have ten times more hold over your allies than over your lobbies. Our expertise in administrative law—I am thinking of the French, in particular—will help recalibrate musclebound interest groups to the advantage of the executive. Paradoxical as it may seem, the promotion of elites from the periphery will serve the purposes of the centre. The same applies to your unwieldy military machine. In a hundred years' time, your redoubtable regional commanders—praetorians deaf to the protests of their colonists and auxiliaries alike—might, following precedent, set themselves up as proconsuls to fight over the remnants of the West. It will be hard for your swaggering C-in-Cs to accept the equal ranking of American forces with the new European supplement, let alone to concede strategic command to officers they have been accustomed to treat as little better than the heads of NGOs. But your allies themselves will be far less resentful once fully integrated into the united armed forces of the USW. New recruits will be galvanized, leaders motivated, general staffs heartened by direct contact with the men at the top—all more royalist than the king. Instead of 'playing an active part alongside the United States', they will at last be at the centre.

The present 'sharing of the burden' leaves too much of it on you. A time will come—for Rome, it was the third century AD—when defence expenditure will exceed the limits acceptable to your domestic opinion. Your hundreds of millions of new taxpayers will at last allow you to stop 'externalizing' the costs—already a hefty percentage of your Federal budget—of that immense military apparatus. What's more, granting citizenship to your oldest allies will swamp the siren voices of isolationist withdrawal with enthusiastic supporters of humanitarian war.

6. You fear the opinion polls: 'America for the Americans!' Yet your analysts already describe Israel as the fifty-first state, Taiwan the fifty-second and Turkey, 67-million strong, as the fifty-third, without Midwest complaint. A marketing campaign will soon persuade the nervous: Infinite Justice, New Frontier, America on the March, Unending Adventure, Happiness Unbounded! We will co-finance it. Reassure your patriots and militias that the demographic doubling, the influx of fresh money, the extension of Americanness, like that of Romanness in its day, will double the glory of your country and its

protective power. Remind them of the gain in strategic depth—your enemies pushed outside a reassuring cordon of buffer states.

There is a reciprocal concession: the right to run for the highest office. You may be alarmed that your great-grandchildren will elect a president born in Mexico, Denmark or France. But the Emperor Trajan, who extended the imperial frontiers of Rome to the Persian Gulf, was Spanish; Septimus Severus, who spoke Punic and Syriac, a Tunisian; and Diocletian a mere Dalmatian, or Croat. Rome was not always in Rome. More than once under those great itinerants, the Antonines, staff and records followed the Number One. Marcus Aurelius ran the empire from the Rhine or the Danube. Constantine moved his capital to the Bosphorus, an offcentre waste land—a brilliant displacement, which did away with the idea of encircling. The shift was to give the first multicultural society a thousand years of supplementary life. Some day, perhaps, the United States of the West will have its capital in Ankara, Honolulu or Messina . . . But let's not get ahead of the music. For the next century, we Europeans can formally guarantee that Washington will remain on the Potomac.

It is for the reasons all too briefly summarized here that we ask you, in all humility, to grant us the rights of the City. I'll leave a memo for your advisers to sift through. My successor will be here in six months for the answer. My respects, Mr President.

And now for the Old World. How best to present the case to a president of the European Commission? East-bank hierarchs, don't forget, are thinner-skinned. The eminent zero will require gentle handling.

1. Dear friend, don't be uneasy. All that is required is your signature. This course was started on years ago—as far back as 1925 at least, when Valéry could write, unblinkingly, that 'Europe visibly aspires to be governed by an American commission'. The US is already a European power by treaty: it sits as a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe—in fact, it controls it. One attempt after another to form a military counterweight has faded into the mist. Who today speaks of the WEU and its 'security charters', the WEAO, the FAWEU, Eurofor and the 'Gymnicks'? Who remembers the Planning Cell, the Franco-German Defence Council,

the European Security Council or even your most recent boast, the 'European Rapid Reaction Force'? At a regional level, NATO is your sole functioning defence structure. If you had had any belief in yourselves, you would have declared the North Atlantic Treaty obsolete after the Berlin Wall came down. But the two currents—Christian and Social Democratic—that have most consistently put their shoulders to the wheel of a federal Europe have been, to say the least, unwavering in support of our liberators' foreign policy. At least, in becoming a fully fledged component of the United States of the West, you may obtain some formal reciprocity.

2. Europe's heart is willing: that is the main thing. Caracalla's edict itself endorsed unconscious small-scale custom. Citizenship was already granted from time to time to army veterans, to Greek or Oriental notables and thinkers, sometimes to whole towns. The situation today is already far more advanced. 'Happy Birthday to You' has supplanted *Bon anniversaire, nos vœux les plus sincères*, as Harry Potter has replaced Le Petit Prince and Mickey Mouse upstaged Spirou. While transatlantic citizenship remains a right to be acquired, Americanness is an established fact. The first will crown the second, a roof placed on the walls of a house that has risen almost imperceptibly, day by day. A change of sovereignty may be decided by treaty; but it will only be real and enduring if there is also an instinctive transfer of allegiance—visual, musical, dietary. For Europeans, especially if they are Russian, Polish or Czech, the biotope is already American.

'If we had to do it again, I would start with culture', Jean Monnet said. Too late. A vote in the European Parliament will always be able to adopt another regulatory procedure, and a referendum with a 30 per cent turnout 'decide' on the birth of a European Federation of Nation States. But even as that mammoth—repainted in washed-out virginal blue, with no surviving trace of blood red—languishes in intensive care, it is being intravenously fed on American sounds and images. Your stock exchanges are tuned to Wall Street, your bankers to Alan Greenspan, your scientific reviews to *Nature*, your prime-time TV to our comedy shows, your current affairs to our opinion makers, your criticism to the *New York Review*. Your managers, your tools, the buzzwords you fetishize—'international community' in place of our colder but more accurate 'international system';

or ‘governance’ for our ‘administration’—are all imported from here, for obvious reasons. Your future CEOs and finance ministers are trained in our business schools, as are the Colombians and Thais. Your presidential hopefuls scramble to be filmed with the Commander-in-Chief on the White House lawn or, better still, at the ranch. Your intellectuals will surely welcome their newly acquired states in the West with more panache than they have displayed to their Eastern acquisitions.

What other country—in the last fifteen hundred years, at least—has been able to offer a common capital to all the world’s youth, whether gilded or deprived? It is futile to protest: happiness was French in the eighteenth century; today it is American. Thomas Jefferson, as his country’s minister in Paris, was in the habit of saying that a civilized man would place his own country first and France second. The motto has been inverted by your young technocrats. All that the French, Germans and Italians know about their neighbours now is transmitted via those of their works that enjoy transatlantic approval. Barely speaking each other’s languages, they communicate in the lingua franca of the unifying third party. The Franco-German intellectual discussions that took place in 1930 no longer exist. Since the US fixes the standards and norms of law, beauty, finance, intelligence and justice, all cultural exchanges pass through here. Gastronomy excepted, all certificates of authenticity and proper functioning—whether of your telephones, your movies or your governments—are American stamped.

3. For all the efforts of your legal and administrative experts, the European State will never leave the drawing board. A good citizen would have to memorize a schema—annually updated—more complex than an oil refinery’s plan: the Commission, the Council, the Parliament, the Court, the seventeen decision-making procedures, scores of abbreviations and acronyms, the key to current compensation scales. The good American just needs to watch TV: flag, Wall Street, weather. USW citizenship will result in an enviable simplification of your people’s daily lives.

Your depoliticized populations naturally lack faith in your electoral process. Under the EU’s unique brand of enlightened despotism, the real power centres—the Central Bank, the Commission,

the Directorates—are utterly undemocratic, while democratic structures—the Assembly at Strasbourg—have no power. Your elected deputies, senators, presidents and prime ministers gesticulate grandly on an empty stage. War and peace, trade policy, budget, currency, major technological choices are out of their hands—hence that far-away look in their eyes. As they cast their ballots for the USW president, European electorates will feel proud to have some influence again.

4. At last, your voice will be heard. Your men of influence will expatiate in newspapers that matter. You will have access to the real decision-makers. Of what use a French or British Security Council veto that has not been used in thirty years? You grumble now about our foreign-policy motives, but you will see our slogan—‘Multilateral when we can, unilateral when we must’—in a new light, once all this is yours. On 19 November 1996, the Security Council voted fourteen to one—the US dissenting—to re-elect Boutros Boutros-Ghali as Secretary General. A fortnight later our candidate Kofi Annan was appointed. That’s the kind of multilateralism you will grow to enjoy. You complain that the American administration goes back on its word—Kyoto, land mines, ICC. Wait till you, too, can overturn a treaty retrospectively through federal law. Only through the USW will Europe have the means to say something to the world again and—more importantly—to make it listen.

You will keep your particularisms. The death penalty has been abolished in Wisconsin and Iowa, too. Besides, is there a single value proclaimed in European speeches that America has not more successfully put into practice? Peace? Both world wars came out of Europe. Democracy? Over here, the community elects even the sheriff and the judge. The New Deal? Equality through redistribution? We claim to be liberals but, when pushed, we can be far more Keynesian than your Euro-socialists. Your Central Bank is a law unto itself, while the Federal Reserve has to submit an annual report to Congress. Finance capital is more constrained in the US than the EU—witness our army of regulators.

5. Was it all for this, you ask? These fifty years of summit meetings, conferences, treaties, pacts—all in vain? Not at all: the EU experience

has been a vital decompression chamber, allowing your rear-guard elements to shed their old habits in order to cope with the great change ahead. French Socialists, for example, could never have pushed through the neoliberal revolution so swiftly if it had not been for the sake of Europe. Nor could the traditional Right so easily have let fall the banner of ‘work, family, fatherland’. Monthly EU meetings are already conducted in English—a crucial transition stage. Norpoisian prudery at the Quai d’Orsay has been overcome. In weaning Europe from its past the EU has been a transitional object of attachment, a baby’s dummy. Now the time has come to move on. Euroland, with its free trade and deregulated economies, will be your trampoline.

However fragrant with fraternity, a false good idea ages badly. Europe’s new currency expresses the emptiness of the supermarket-state: notes from no-man’s-land that show featureless bridges and windows opening on the void. No portraits, no landscapes, no maxims—have the Europeans no achievements, no history? Dollar bills, by contrast, proclaim America’s eternal faith in God and in itself: a combat currency, splendidly messianic, with its roll-call of heroes, eagles, arrows, olive branch and the All-Seeing Eye.

6. There will be some regrets, of course. Britain will have to forgo its special relationship—and for that very reason will probably try to torpedo the project. France, having lost most in Europe, will have most to gain, not least getting free of German leadership. In compensation, once within the USW, both will gain that indispensable factor in foreign affairs: a stateside diaspora. Up till now, neither country has been able to compete with the Irish and Italians, let alone Cubans or Israelis. But with 60 million Franco-Americans, things will start to change.

As for your public opinion: recent experience has shown the unreliability of the referendum process, so no need to make too much fuss. Your governments anyway prefer to dispense with fanfares and military parades. Three extra initials on the passport, some flags to run up, bilingual messages to be played on internal flights—the necessary adjustments will hardly be noticed at all. Your signature here, please, at the bottom of the page.

And as for you and your anti-imperialist friends, my dear Debray, you may think the game is up. On the contrary—this will be just the beginning. From now on, your critiques will no longer be treated as crude anti-Americanism but as democratic civic protest. Cheer up! I see you now, marching on Washington, arm in arm with your fellow dissidents, Chomsky, Mailer, Sontag, Vidal.

See you later!

Your

Xavier

*C***'s letter, mailed from Washington only days before he left on a mission for his new government, arrived too late for Régis Debray to reply with his own, very different future for Europe, as he explains in an epitaph for the former French diplomat:*

*'Why should a patriot change his country? Flavius Josephus, Jewish military leader of the 1st century AD, walked out on a hopeless war of independence and went over to the Romans, announcing, "God has fled his sanctuary and set up with those against whom you are fighting". For a man like Xavier de C***, the thought that the genius of the West had fled across the Atlantic, to punish the impiety of the Old World, would be reason enough to follow it with arms and baggage. Flavius ended his days in the luxury of the Court, re-writing the history of the Jews. C*** paid a higher price. A Transoxanian specialist—he spoke fluent Turkmen, Karakalpak, Uzbek and Tajiki—man of action and strategic analyst, his talents had long been of service to the French state. They were now at the Americans' disposal.*

*'Shortly after posting his letter to me, C*** was dispatched by the Pentagon to Turkmenistan. He was killed one icy evening in November 2001, along with most of his men. They had advanced towards the Afghan frontier by Balkh, without encountering any resistance, when a cluster bomb, dropped wide of target by a B52, exploded over them.'*