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## **The Nobel Prize Fantasy: The European Union As a Peacekeeper**

By Doug Bandow - 10/15/2012

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The Nobel Peace Prize long has distinguished itself for its dubious choices. Most of the past recipients are unknown today: no one remembers their supposed contributions to world peace.

Other selections make little sense. UNICEF collected the award nearly five decades ago—a worthy agency, perhaps, but not one that promoted “peace” as commonly understood. Similar were later choices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the group Doctors Without Borders. The [International Campaign to Ban Landmines](#) promotes an appealing cause, but one which might actually make war more likely by limiting use of a defensive weapon.

Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho were jointly recognized for negotiating the “end” of the Vietnam War, which simply led to more fighting and the collapse of South Vietnam a few years later. Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchu Tum was cited for her efforts on behalf of “social justice” rather than peace; she later was found to have falsified her story. Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change shared a highly political award for highly partisan environmental activism which did not promote peace.

More worthy was Mikhail Gorbachev, though his diplomatic partner, Ronald Reagan, probably should have shared the award. Muhammad Yunus of the Grameen Bank pioneered a new strategy for development, but it had nothing to do with peacemaking. Then there was the 2009 prize for [Barack Obama](#), who had done nothing on behalf of peace; ironically, in the last three years the president has reversed the famous 1960s slogan and used his power to “make war not love.”

Now the Nobel Committee has chosen the European Union.

At least the Committee included the word “peace” in its official explanation, that the EU had promoted “peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights” around the world. However, with the common currency zone in crisis and opposition growing to greater centralization of power in Brussels, the Nobel

Committee—hailing from Norway, which does not belong to the EU—appeared to have a more political purpose in mind for the award.

Committee Chairman Thorbjorn Jagland explained: “we saw that the prize could be important in giving a message to the European public of how important it is to secure what they have achieved on this continent.” However, he doesn’t just believe that the EU as organized is important. Resolving the economic challenge was necessary in order “that European unity can be kept so that Europe can move forward.” That is, toward ever greater central control with more power consolidated in Brussels. In Europe, at least, there is no other definition of progress. The Eurocrats who dominate politics, the media, academia, and business believe it is not enough to urge people across the continent to voluntarily cooperate. They must be forced to do so if necessary.

Naturally, EU officials were delighted with the award. Two of the organization’s three “presidents,” Herman Van Rompuy and Jose Manuel Barroso, declared that the award “shows that in these difficult times the European Union remains an inspiration for leaders and citizens all over the world.” Well, in Norway at least. Jagland admitted that he wants his nation to join the EU. But few other peoples or governments appear to be rushing to emulate the attempt by European elites to impose an ever more powerful yet unaccountable centralized bureaucracy on nominally democratic states.

The EU began decades ago as a small organization to promote economic cooperation. Its emphasis was breaking down trade barriers: indeed, the organization once was known as the “Common Market,” a worthy endeavor that helped tie formerly warring European states together. Over time the organization expanded to 27 states and took on new political responsibilities. Although the principal cause of peace was profound horror at war after two monstrous, murderous conflicts which killed tens of millions, the growing ties through the EU did draw nations into a tighter embrace.

However, the organization has been less successful in promoting peace outside of its core members. Weirdly, Jagland lauded the EU as a peacemaker in the Balkans: “We have to remember it was not that many years ago that these people were slaughtering each other on the streets.” Yet European governments, most notably Germany, *helped trigger the Balkans crisis* by, for instance, offering premature recognition for seceding territories. And the EU proved unable to limit, let alone stop, the murderous violence once it erupted.

As the Balkans descended into war Jacques Poos, the foreign affairs minister of Luxembourg and president of the Council of the European Union, grandly declared: the “hour of Europe is at hand.” But Europe could do nothing. Yet again the continent called on aid from across “the Pond.” The Dayton agreement

which ended Bosnia's civil war was called the Dayton Agreement because it was negotiated in ... Dayton, Ohio in a process led by U.S. officials.

In Kosovo EU governments, acting through NATO, did little more than hold Washington's coat as it bombed the Serbs, ultimately forcing Kosovo's independence. Europe played a significant occupation role only after the U.S. had ousted Belgrade's military forces. Nor has this process led to stability. The ethnic Albanians brutally purged a quarter million ethnic Serbs from the new country and most of the latter who remain continue to resist their forcible incorporation in what has been a quasi-gangster state.

Moreover, there was an even more important factor in the maintenance of peace for Europe which the Nobel Committee entirely ignored: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO has outlived its original purpose, but it was famously said that the alliance was intended to keep the Americans in, the Germans down, and the Russians out. The result was to ensure Europe's security.

The poor, suffering American taxpayers continue to defend the Europeans from phantom threats even though long ago the latter were well able to protect themselves. Today the EU has a larger population and GDP than America. Although the EU played an important role in the continent's peaceful development, the U.S. spent so much for so long to provide a military wall behind which Western Europe could prosper. A Nobel "shout-out" to the American people would seem to be in order.

It is also worth noting how the EU fails to live up to its own grand rhetoric as well as that of the Nobel Committee. Forget the petty corruption, political abuse, and endemic waste. That is what government is everywhere and always about. Forget the destructive continental selfishness, such as the Common Agricultural Policy, which wastes money on a prodigious scale—even worse than U.S. food programs—subsidizing farmers in rich countries while devastating farmers in poor countries. Forget the nonsensical regulation, under which, for instance, a British grocer who insisted on using old imperial weights for his produce was arrested. Forget even the self-serving propaganda and sanctimony with which the Eurocratic elite baptizes its every action.

The worst failing of the EU is its direct assault on democracy and accountability. Maybe the Eurocrats would do a better job than the citizens in

governing the continent. However, people have a right to rule themselves. And that is precisely what so many European leaders are determined to prevent.

The chief problem is not the EU's response to the Eurozone crisis. For instance, the spokeswoman for Greece's left-wing opposition party Syriza called the award "an insult to the people of Europe themselves, who currently are experiencing an undeclared war as a result of the barbaric, anti-social austerity policies that are destroying social cohesion and democracy." One can debate the wisdom of the EU's Euro strategy, but no one forced Athens to borrow so much money, implement such foolish policies, or request a bail-out. In fact, much to Brussels' dismay the Greeks insisted on holding elections, which resulted in a new government determined to work with the rest of the EU. The organization was irresponsible in admitting Greece to the Eurozone, since everyone knew that Athens was lying about its economic status, policies, and prospects. But allowing the Greeks to hang themselves doesn't constitute a "war."

Where the elites are at war with the people is on expansion of the organization's authority. The public is not enthused. A recent Eurobarometer poll found that trust in the EU had fallen to 31 percent, from 57 percent just five years ago. But if there is one constant in European politics, it is that the Eurocrats never take "no" for an answer. The ultimate objective is a consolidated, continental government based in Brussels. If that requires overriding the public's will, so be it.

For many years there has been pressure at the top for creation of a far more centralized quasi-nation state, a de facto "United States of Europe." In 2004 leading Eurocrats drafted a constitution to transform what remained a loose federation into something closer to a continental government. It was a complex document which proposed to shift responsibilities, or "competencies," from national governments to Brussels, limit national vetoes over EU decisions, create a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and a European foreign service, and establish a "president," the President of the European Council.

The document generated much enthusiasm in Brussels, but far less elsewhere. Constitutional change required popular approval, and voters in France and the Netherlands promptly said no. The Eurocrats could have accepted the people's judgment. Could have, but naturally refused to do

so. Former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who played a lead role in drafting the new document, learned a different lesson: "Above all, it is to avoid having referendums." Of course.

So the EU leadership moved a few commas and jumbled the text a bit, making the document even more abstruse, and then reissued it as a treaty which only required parliamentary approval. With the fix in, every national parliament promptly gave its assent to the so-called Lisbon Treaty. Except in Ireland, where the constitution required a referendum.

To the shock and horror of the usual suspects, in June 2008 Irish voters rejected the agreement. How dare the people say no to what Europe's enlightened leadership had so selflessly negotiated! For exercising their democratic rights the Irish were called "extremely arrogant" by one British Labor MP—who, of course, had been elected by British citizens exercising their democratic rights. German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, who now serves as Finance Minister and thus chief enforcer of financial orthodoxy against Greece and other Euro-delinquents, complained that "a few million Irish cannot decide on behalf of 495 million Europeans." Of course, he believed that just a few thousand Europeans, the ruling class centered in Brussels and capital cities across the continent, should do the deciding.

Again, the Eurocrats could have accepted the people's decision. Not that any of them considered that idea any longer than it took to reject it. Thought was given to tossing the ungrateful Irish out of the EU or turning them into second class members. But the Eurocrats decided that Ireland should simply vote again—and get the decision right this time. The EU spent generously on propaganda while organization officials flooded the small nation warning of catastrophe should the Irish say no. On the verge of a continental economic crisis, Brussels insisted that only more centralized power could maintain Irish prosperity. This time a majority of Irish voters did as demanded.

It seemed that Brussels' moment for time in the sun finally had come. Wrote Gideon Rachman of the *Financial Times*: "some European leaders allowed themselves to dream of a new world order—one in which the European Union was finally recognized as a global superpower, to rank alongside the U.S. and China." The EU surmounted a few final speed bumps, such as the refusal of

Czech President Vaclav Klaus to be rushed in signing his nation's ratification, and the Lisbon Treaty took effect.

Finally impatient Eurocrats were able to divide the political spoils. Characteristically, they chose the undistinguished and unknown Van Rompuy—a former Belgian prime minister most celebrated for his penchant for writing Japanese haiku—over internationally known candidates such as former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. *Times* columnist Brownen Maddox observed: “The haggling over Europe's new top jobs resembles that old children's card game of mixing up the heads, bellies and feet of different animals, for a deliberately preposterous result.”

Among the “new EU's” first controversies was deciding which European “president” would be the first to shake President Barack Obama's hand and which would be able to sit next to him at the U.S.-EU summit, scheduled for May 2010 in Madrid. The meeting later was cancelled by Washington officials who embarrassed Brussels by deciding that it would be a waste of time.

The Nobel award has created a similar problem for the EU today. Jagland said that the organization would “have to decide what leader will come and receive the medal.” That decision could trigger a mini-war. Messers Barroso and Van Rompuy naturally laid claim to the privilege. So did Martin Schulz, president of the European Parliament. The Lisbon Treaty was supposed to have answered Henry Kissinger's famous question, what is the phone number to call Europe? But the agreement merely intensified bureaucratic rivalries. The Nobel compromise likely will involve these three and perhaps more officials together on stage or nearby.

Despite the praise of the Nobel Committee, the EU remains an unloved artificial construct at war with the principle of self-government. Outside of those on the EU payroll, no one flies the EU flag, looks to the European Commission for leadership, or feels loyalty to Brussels. Real politics in Europe remains national: even votes cast for candidates to the European Parliament have virtually nothing to do with continental issues and everything to do with local politics. Czech President Klaus shocked an uncomprehending European Parliament when he diagnosed the problem: “There is no European demos—and no European nation,” which intensifies the problem of “the democratic deficit, the loss of democratic accountability, the decision-making of the

unelected.” Such an organization is a dubious candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Still, nothing seems to cool the ardor of the Eurocrats for their “European Project” creating a true continental government. Is the Eurozone in danger of falling apart? No worries. Just concentrate more power in Brussels. Commission President Barroso said: “Once again, we can see that a crisis can accelerate decision-making when it crystallizes political will. Solutions that seemed out of reach only a few years or even months ago are now possible.” If that is what most Europeans want they should have it, of course. But there’s no evidence that is what most Europeans want.

The formation of the EU occurred as Europeans were growing closer. Nevertheless, despite the Eurocrats’ best efforts the EU has not eliminated national feelings or erased differences in national history, tradition, and culture. Far more than language divides European states, and those differences are far greater than the differences among American states. At the most basic level, no one roots for a European “football” (soccer) team; to the contrary, the bitterest rivalries are among European squads.

And now the Eurocrisis is spurring nationalist antagonism. Greeks are tired of having to pay for their past mistakes; Germans are tired of having to subsidize Greeks for the latter’s past mistakes. Protests against EU-imposed austerity continue to spread while Berlin is accused of setting up a Fourth Reich. Of the Eurocrisis, warned Mark Leonard of the European Council on Foreign Relations, “economically, culturally and politically, it is driving Europe apart.”

A cooperative Europe is good for the continent and the world. However, increasingly the EU is less a shared enterprise than a mandated order, imposed on the masses by elites determined to take whatever steps are necessary, including preventing the people from voting on the new superstate being constructed in Brussels. Where it will end is impossible to predict. But contrary to the Nobel Committee’s hopes, unpopular and artificial systems imposed from above rarely result in genuine and lasting peace.