Guizot and Europe

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Madam Secretary General,
Mr. Director of Archives,
Mr. President of the Association François Guizot,
Members and correspondents of the Institut,
Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

There are many places in France where the memory of François Guizot deserves to be honored. To limit myself to Paris, if I can't mention the dome of the Pantheon, how can I not think of that of the Sorbonne, since a few meters from the chapel, one of the main amphitheatres bears the historian's name. But it's above all the dome of the Institut de France that comes to mind: having become Minister of Public Instruction in 1832, the academic was the refounder of our Académie des sciences morales et politiques, abolished thirty years earlier by Bonaparte. He was soon to sit in three of the five academies of the Institut, and it is fitting that in 2024, on the 150th anniversary of his death, a tribute will be paid to Guizot's memory under "la Coupole", the emblem and shelter of intellectual freedom, European humanism and French continuity at its best.

But it's not just on the Quai de Conti that François Guizot is a founder. He was also a founder further downstream on the same bank of the Seine, at no. 37 Quai d'Orsay, since it was to him that we owe the construction of this ministry that has become the metonymy of French diplomacy. Although he remained Minister of Foreign Affairs without interruption for more than seven years - eighty-eight months to be precise - which is considerable even for the 19th century (and highly enviable for the 21st), Guizot was unable to complete the building of his ministry, which was only finished in 1853. But let's take a look at the commemorative medal struck to mark the laying of the foundation stone for the "new hotel of the Minister of Foreign Affairs", on November 29, 1845. The reverse shows the profile of King Louis-Philippe, surrounded by Hercules and Minerva: Hercules represents strength, which, to be used properly, needs wisdom, hence Minerva. On the obverse, the inscription recalls the founding of the

Ministry by Guizot; above it is depicted the beautiful façade by architect Jacques Lacornée; and, most surprisingly, at the top the master engraver has inscribed three words, surely at the request of the Minister of Foreign Affairs: "LAW OF PEOPLE."

Why these three words, when so many others were possible? What do they tell us about the diplomacy of the time and, at a time when diplomacy was still essentially European, what do they tell us about François Guizot's idea of Europe? More surely than Orson Welles' "*Rosebud*", the inscription "LAW OF PEOPLE" is a solid clue.

Guizot and Europe" cannot be evoked by limiting ourselves to the years he spent at the head of French diplomacy. His whole life was marked by international issues, both before he came to power and after 1848, in the twenty-six years that followed, until his death in 1874.

Since he was a historian before becoming a statesman, his conception of Europe is first and foremost rooted in history, a long history.

Europe", he wrote in his *Memoirs*, "is a society of peoples and states at once diverse and similar, separate and not foreign, not only neighbors, but kinsmen, united by moral and material ties that they cannot break, by the mixture of races, the community of religion, the analogy of ideas and mores, by numerous and continuous industrial, commercial, political and literary relations, by varied and unequal progress of civilization but which tend towards the same ends. The peoples of Europe know each other, understand each other, visit each other, imitate each other, and incessantly modify each other. Through all the diversities and struggles of the modern world, a superior and profound unity reigns in its moral life as in its destinies."

As we can see, Guizot does not deny the differences between "the peoples", but to demonstrate the unity of Europe, he describes the general movement of progress that is taking these peoples, at different speeds, along "the same paths". He would return to this essential idea in *Three generations*:

"For fifteen centuries, the whole of Europe, and France in particular, have been following the same path of emancipation and general progress. These paths have led the peoples most firmly committed to them to that high degree of power, prosperity and greatness which we call modern civilization."

In his famous *History of Civilization in Europe*, which grew out of his lectures at the Sorbonne in 1828 and was immediately published, Guizot offers a spectacular fresco of European history. While the main subject is not what we call "international relations", nor the emergence of a "European system", these issues are obviously not absent. First, Guizot devotes a few pages to the birth of diplomacy, which took place in two stages. The first took place in the late 15th and early 16th centuries:

"It was in the 15th century that relations between governments began to become frequent, regular and permanent. It was then that those great combinations of alliances were first formed, either for peace or for war, which later produced the system of equilibrium."

The first effect of the emergence of diplomacy was therefore the formation of alliances or leagues, whose aim was to prevent any one European sovereign from acquiring "excessive preponderance" over the others. From the outset, diplomacy was an antidote to the poison of hegemonic pretensions, which Guizot never ceased to denounce; it provided states with a means of opposing the imperial and forced unifications of Europe, and contributed to progress towards freedom.

The second consequence of the birth of European diplomacy was the strengthening of royal power within the States. As foreign policy could only be conducted "by a single person or a small number of people", these issues escaped the people, who left them "to the discretion of the central power". Thus, he concludes, "diplomacy was born in the hands of kings".

The second stage in the genesis of diplomacy came at the time of Louis XIV. From the Treaties of Westphalia (1648) onwards, power politics were no longer dictated by whether a country belonged to a particular denomination - Catholic or Protestant, since at the Treaty of Westphalia Catholicism had to accept "the freedom of conscience of States" in Europe, whereas it "absolutely refused the existence of Protestant States". On the other hand, foreign policy "became much more systematic, more regular, and always directed towards a certain goal, according to permanent principles. The regular birth of the system of equilibrium in Europe belongs to this period." To put it in our own words, diplomacy became secularized and rationalized, strengthening modern states and promoting the balance of power. Born of the Reformation movement against medieval Christianity, it is now taking shape in the "Westphalian" spirit of international relations. This diplomacy did not unify European states, but it was common to political Europe, like the law of nations, *Jus gentium* or *Jus inter gentes* - *Grotius's De Jure belli ac pacis* appeared in 1625. Diplomacy and law are consistent with European civilization as Guizot understands it, in that they are perfectly in line with the same sense of history.

Our historian is interested in Louis XIV's diplomacy for another reason.

"It has often been said that the propagation of absolute power was the dominant principle of Louis XIV; I don't think so. [...]. He acted much less with a view to the propagation of absolute power than out of a desire for power and the enlargement of France."

In other words, the Sun King's European policy was not ideological - to impose or spread a political model in Europe - but purely interest-based. We can see the background to this historical distinction: it enabled Guizot to contrast Louis XIV with Napoleon, whose actions were both conquering and ideological.

Let's leave *History of Civilization in Europe*, which ends before the Revolution, and refer to all Guizot's other writings - speeches, biographies, memoirs - in which one constant idea is expressed: the rejection of the international policy pursued by the First Republic and the First Empire. We must not underestimate the traumatic effect of this period of his life, which was for him, in many respects, including from a diplomatic point of view, a veritable repulsor, an anti-model for Europe.

In this, he distinguished himself from the Romantics, the Republican Left of his time, and even Thiers. All of them, in Guizot's eyes, were wrong to cultivate "this posthumous passion for adventure and conquest". After all, what did they all find in this revolutionary and then Napoleonic France? How can we forget that it "gave rise to the most violent and iniquitous foreign policy the world has ever known, the policy of armed propaganda and infinite conquest, the upheaval of all European societies through war? How can we forget that it "trampled underfoot the principles, traditions and establishments of European public law"? "Too much arrogance in force and too much disdain for law, too much revolution and too little freedom": this is how he summed up Napoleon's Europe. For Guizot, domestic and foreign policy were intertwined. At home, Napoleon's policy was one of contempt for law and liberty, while abroad "the arbitrary and unlimited ambition of the sovereign became the supreme law everywhere". The result: in 1815, the entire continent - not only its governments, but also its peoples - rejected France's "blindly haughty domination". Who can be nostalgic for such a past, when we can finally enjoy peace with freedom?

Contrary to the prevailing public opinion in France at the time, Guizot had no hesitation in saying that "all things considered, there was in Europe after the Congress of Vienna and under the domination of the Holy Alliance, more liberty and respect for law than under the regime of the Convention or of the Emperor Napoleon I." In his view, the Restoration had "the double virtue of restoring respect for the empire of law, within the law of citizens, outside the law of nations".

But does he fully endorse the European system of 1815? Certainly not. While he saw the advantages of a pacified system, he disapproved of the Holy Alliance, whose aim was to prevent the spread of political freedoms, and which claimed to intervene by force in recalcitrant states. For Guizot, interventionism on an ideological basis is no better when desired by the

autocrat of all the Russias than when it is the work of the Emperor of the French. Repressive reaction and the revolutionary process are placed back to back. No Napoleonic Empire, no Holy Alliance.

But from 1830 onwards, the question was no longer posed in these terms. Gone were the days when an absolutist bloc could dictate the law. Following the victory of the liberals in Paris and Brussels, Europe's diplomatic system entered a new phase. Less authoritarian and less ideological, more pragmatic and more flexible, the European Concert is not always efficient, but sometimes it is. The London Conferences led to the birth of Belgium: a new independent state was formed in one of Europe's most sensitive regions, through multilateral diplomacy and with the agreement of the powers that be. The Belgian question is also emblematic because, like Greek independence, it showed that the frontiers of 1815 are not totally fixed, and that Europe can be modified without leading to general war or chaos.

However, Louis-Philippe's monarchy, born of a revolution, had to prove its conservatism to the rest of Europe and be reasonable in its ambitions. During his time at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Guizot used this metaphor in a speech to the Chamber of Peers:

> "France has long lived in Europe as a meteor, a flaming meteor, seeking its place in the general system of European states. [Today] what should France do? Adopt a quiet policy, take its place as a fixed star, with a regular and predictable course, in the European system [...]. Then you will see France regain, in special matters, all its independence, all its influence, all its actions."

It's impossible to be more reasonable than a fixed star... Will it be inert for all that? As Guizot always stressed, particularly when the opposition criticized him for his immobilism, the July Monarchy rejected foreign intervention in the lives of independent states as a matter of principle. But if an absolutist power intervened in Belgium, Switzerland, Piedmont or Spain, France would not remain inert, but would act in favor of freedom. Guizot's France protected its independence by protecting that of its immediate neighbors. This contrasted sharply with the foreign policy of the Restoration, which was close to autocratic Russia and had waged war in Spain to consolidate the absolutism of King Ferdinand VII. Louis-Philippe's France was certainly anti-revolutionary, like all European governments, but it was also liberal. It wanted to show solidarity with other liberal states. However, it claimed to promote its principles only peacefully, by offering them the most beautiful of showcases: "The appearance and example of a well-governed country are more powerful than armies for spreading the ideas and desires of good government."

At a time when Napoleon's history was being rediscovered - or reinvented - as a glorious modern French epic, this was hardly likely to satisfy his political opponents, let alone public

opinion. Adolphe Thiers, who came to power in 1840, played the popular card by organizing the Retour des Cendres (Return of the Ashes) - a veritable "heritage grab" in the eyes of the Bonapartists. The international context gave this staging a particular acuity, as it occurred at the very moment when a major Eastern crisis pitted France against all the other major European powers. It was in these circumstances that Guizot arrived at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on October 29, 1840.

Let's recall the context. Egypt was part of the Ottoman Empire, but with considerable autonomy. Sheltered by this favorable status, the Viceroy of Egypt, Mehemet Ali, pursued a policy of conquest on his own behalf, expanding southwards towards the Sudan and along the Red Sea, but above all dominating Syria - in the broadest sense, i.e. including Lebanon and Palestine. Since the early 1830s, Mehemet Ali has controlled most of the Arab part of the Ottoman Empire, threatening its very existence. However, Egypt was a "client" of France, and the other major European powers did not want at any price a reshuffling of the entire Orient that would mainly benefit France. So it's a question of weakening the French to make the Egyptians back down, or weakening the Egyptians to make the French back down.

Since the beginning of 1840, Guizot has been ambassador to London. He had accepted this embassy after refusing the one in Constantinople, which he felt was too far away for a politician of his stature. Settled on the banks of the Thames, he remained close to the French parliamentary game without being involved in its day-to-day running. What's more, it was in London that the major issues of European diplomacy were decided.

But the British government was dominated by Palmerston, with whom Guizot would never get along. Adolphe Thiers, then head of government, sought to negotiate an agreement directly with the Ottoman Empire to present Europe with a fait accompli. On the one hand, Thiers believed he could free himself from the European Concert; on the other, Palmerston wanted to isolate France by uniting the great powers against it. And in the middle: Guizot, ambassador to London, charged with executing a policy whose bellicose spirit he hardly approved of.

In July 1840, the representatives of the four powers - England, Austria, Prussia and Russia - reached an agreement to support the Ottoman Empire, while issuing an ultimatum to Mehemet Ali. France - and thus Guizot - was thus sidelined from the European Concert, and faced with a "coalition" of Napoleon's victors that was unpleasant to its memory. Thiers made preparations for war. France and Europe were at a turning point.

In the end, the Egyptians, less solid than had been thought, lost ground in the Middle East. Louis-Philippe was able to disassociate himself from Thiers' policy and advocate France's

return to the European Concert. To lead this diplomacy of appeasement, he called François Guizot to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This crisis showed that public opinion remains highly inflammable, not only in France - the Romantic generation, nostalgic for grandeur and easily obsessive, still feels trapped in the Holy Alliance - but throughout Europe. If the great powers had been forced to join forces, the peoples of Europe would have supported them against France, always suspicious of a return to its conquering spirit. In this affair, two political errors were made: Thiers' error, who believed he could free himself from the European Concert at the risk of isolation; and Palmerston's error, who deliberately sidelined France in an offensive manner. Both statesmen had played with fire; Guizot wanted to draw a political lesson from it.

For the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, liberal France must strengthen its ties with liberal England, seek agreement with her in all circumstances, and double diplomatic relations with personal relations between rulers and even between sovereigns. The aim was not to negotiate an alliance, but to implement an agreement. Thus, the first Entente Cordiale was born out of the need to overcome the crisis of 1840. The same was true of the second Entente Cordiale, born of the need to overcome the Franco-English crisis at Fachoda in 1898. But the second Entente Cordiale took place in a very different context from the first. By 1904, Europe, though at peace, would be divided into two opposing blocs of alliances. In Guizot's time, the Concert européen was a much more flexible system, as the powers did not enter into alliances in peacetime, but rather moved closer to one or the other, depending on the subject and circumstances.

In a speech to the Chamber of Peers in 1843, Guizot explained this reality, so different from what Europe would experience after 1870:

"Good intelligence with everyone, good relations, and no shackling intimacy. [...] We may, in special circumstances, accept, even seek, this or that alliance; but in the regular, habitual state of European politics, no such need weighs on us."

When two powers choose to concert their policies as often as possible and on as many subjects as possible, we speak of an entente. And when we want to suggest that this understanding comes from the heart, or when the political choice coincides with a personal closeness based on a certain cordiality, then the expression entente cordiale is appropriate.

Why such an agreement with England? Not because it always has interests in common with France, but precisely because the two powers most often have opposing interests. Lord Aberdeen," writes Guizot, "was deeply convinced that the two peoples who could do each other the most harm are also the ones most interested in living well together."

Aberdeen and Guizot epitomize the Entente Cordiale of the 1840s. Their cordiality was not feigned. In his office at the Ministry, Guizot placed the portrait of his British counterpart and friend (next to that of George Washington), and sent him his own. The two men constantly wrote private letters to each other, in friendly, trusting tones. This personal understanding helped them through some serious Franco-English crises. Sometimes, France gave the impression of backing down, as in the Pritchard affair in 1844. At other times, on the contrary, the British government felt it had to give in, as in the case of Spanish marriages in 1846.

A courageous yet unpopular policy. In the France of the 1840s, Anglophobia had lost none of its intensity; it was reduced but not extinguished in the 1850s thanks to the Crimean War, before flaring up again at the end of the century. This is why "Lord Guizot" - his nickname at the time - was accused of aligning himself with England and bringing France down.

Costly for the statesman, this Franco-English diplomacy contributed, among many other causes, to his downfall in 1848. But it outlived him, under the Second Republic and Napoleon III, as he never failed to point out. At the end of the Second Empire, for example, he rejoiced in the "ties of every kind that have been established between the two peoples" thanks to "the cessation of permanent hostility with France", as the various regimes that succeeded one another in Paris "have, basically and on the whole, practiced the same policy in this respect"

Guizot was right. From the end of December 1848, after Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's election as president, and later under the Empire, French diplomacy made good relations with England a priority. Firstly, because republican and then imperial France needed this understanding to find and keep its place in the European Concert. But also because, on the question of the East, Paris and London understood that their good understanding was the only way to block Russia's rise to power. The Crimean War, and the major strategic retreat that the Franco-British alliance then imposed on the Russians, was an extension of Guizot's policy, dare we say, by other means - those of war. What [Russia] has always worked hardest to prevent or destroy is the alliance between France and England," he wrote in the 1860s. [...] She knows, and a hard experience has recently proved it to her, that she can meet there France and England actively united against her designs."

Now we come to the Second Empire. The liberal statesman could not but be hostile to this Caesarist, authoritarian, plebiscitary regime, the very antithesis of his lifelong political convictions. However, his opposition to Napoleon III was not absolute. An unpublished document found in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs bears witness to this. Guizot knew most of the ambassadors of the Second Empire, his former subordinates until 1848. Some

had remained friends, such as Adolphe Barrot - Odilon Barrot's brother - who, in 1854, told one of his colleagues about a conversation he had just had with Guizot:

"He told me that the advent of the Emperor was the only rational thing to come out of the chaos of 1851. There was only a choice between a strong, energetic government and anarchy, and without having in the least abdicated his sympathies and convictions, his choice could not hesitate for a moment: 'I liked better what preserves than what destroys'."

However, it was not until the Liberal Empire that Guizot came to the Quai d'Orsay, in the Ministry he had designed and built. Finally, on January 20, 1870, he entered the splendid salons, where a long-time friend, now Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Napoléon Daru, awaited him.

What was Guizot's opinion of the European policy of Napoleon III, who had fought several wars, pursued an active policy in favor of nationalities and even conceived global ambitions?

In the Crimean War, he could only welcome the defeat imposed on Russia by the Franco-English alliance. Although he initially feared a conflict that could have led to "twenty years of chaos" in a Europe still weakened by the "Springtime of the Peoples", he later noted that Napoleon III sincerely sought to end the war after the capture of Sebastopol, and then adopted a moderate and peaceful policy at the Paris Congress of 1856 - held at the Quai d'Orsay.

Guizot is more critical of the Italian War of 1859. He is very skeptical of Cavour and the Italian unification, which he does not believe to be lasting, even after it was achieved in 1861—a sentiment shared by many diplomats at the time. For Guizot, it was necessary to create a confederation among the main Italian states, free from foreign domination and endowed with constitutional regimes. As it happens, this is exactly what Napoleon III aimed to achieve in Italy: emancipation, confederation, maintaining the Pope in Rome, political and legal modernization, and, of course, French influence over the whole. While Guizot could not approve of the way Napoleon III allied with Piedmont in 1858, he was not far from the Emperor's vision of Italy, at least before Cavour's cunning and Garibaldi's audacity completely changed the course of history.

What about the German unification by Bismarck? Guizot published a long article in September 1868, two years after Sadowa and the creation of the North German Confederation by a hegemonic and martial Prussia. Of course, he is too much a friend of international law to not lament the "violations of public law" in the war between German states in 1866, the

"usurpations" by Prussians at the expense of German princes and free cities. But in 1868, Guizot is optimistic. He thinks that Wilhelm I is an honest man and that he "remains a moderate prince and a friend of peace." Bismarck himself "stopped; he hastened to accept limits to his victory and to consecrate it through peace." And Guizot concludes: "I see nowhere that the passions and chances of war dominate; I recognize everywhere the predominance of the feelings, interests, and instincts of peace."

A grave misjudgment. Like many of his contemporaries, Guizot thinks that Southern Germany could never consent to a German unity led by Berlin. However, even in the south, the German national spirit is fervent and only awaits the spark to ignite it. A misjudgment also on Prussian policy, for while he rightly saw that "Germany is today the revolutionarily belligerent nation of Europe," Guizot believed that diplomacy would be able to contain the standoff between Prussia and France.

Having always seen the revolutionary spirit as the sole possible cause of a universal upheaval, Guizot could not imagine that the danger would come from a great State. A State conservative in some respects but determined to redraw the map of Europe by breaking the European Concert; a State powerful by its army and its shameless foreign policy; a conquering and manipulative State, knowing how to pit one people against another. "There is no nation prey to war fever, no head of State ardent with ambition and conquest," he wrote as late as September 1868. Guizot could not foresee Bismarck.

Then came the war of 1870, and with it another Europe, that of nationalisms. A Europe without Europe. During the siege of Paris in 1870, Guizot vainly tried to mobilize his British friends. He wrote to one of them:

"If this struggle does not soon result in a serene and lasting peace, it will leave between two great peoples, for a time impossible to measure, an inheritance of anger, vengeance, and equally immeasurable misery."

One could not put it better, and this is exactly what happened. Nationalisms, a world war, totalitarianism, another world war, hell. Then the spirit of European construction. For to heal this Europe so far removed from what Guizot envisioned at the end of the progress of civilization, new thinking was needed. In this same Quai d'Orsay founded by the historian-minister, Aristide Briand conceived in 1929 the first proposals aiming to create "a sort of federal link," then in 1950 Schuman made his famous declaration in favor of an "organized

Europe," "indispensable to the preservation of peace." The Europe "organized" by "a sort of federal link" was not Guizot's, who could not conceive of such remedies, having never known such evils.

And yet, if 21st-century European law has little in common with 19th-century international law, one could substitute the latter for the former in the following citation to define quite aptly the spirit of the European Union:

"Domestically, political freedom, the only effective guarantee of the security of private interests and good public administration; externally, international law, the only effective guarantee of good relations between nations and their mutual civilization."

For in his fundamental diptych, Guizot never separates the national, state dimension from the international, European dimension. As we have recalled, the historian never denied the differences between nations, but he saw them advancing on "the same paths" toward the same civilization. Ambassador and minister, Guizot could not forget that he lived in the century of the European Concert. Too often, as Georges-Henri Soutou showed in his History of Europe since 1815, historiography has seen in the 19th century only the affirmation of nations, without always recognizing the measure of European consciousness after the fall of Napoleon, nor perceiving the reality of a system that, even if very imperfect, founded a Europe on its ability to regulate its differences, to maintain a balance between powers, to share certain values, to develop common diplomatic practices and legal rules.

In his *History of Civilization*, Guizot highlighted the double historical movement that characterizes Europe: on one hand, the formation of States through national unification and political centralization; and on the other hand, the emancipation of minds. Two contradictory movements, since the former favors absolute power while the latter tends to resist it. But for Guizot, the contradiction resolves in the advent of representative government and the progress of political liberties. To this well-known analysis, we must add a second, at the international level, with another double historical movement: on one hand, the formation of a European consciousness and on the other hand, the consolidation of sovereign States. One promotes unity, the other independence. Doesn't the contradiction resolve in the progress of this "European public law" and all the perspectives it opens, in this "law of nations" that Guizot chose to inscribe at the top of the Quai d'Orsay medal?

"This law, long and still very imperfect, very often unrecognized and violated, is nonetheless real, and becomes increasingly clear and imperative as general civilization develops and the mutual relations of peoples become more frequent and intimate."

Through this thought, Guizot remains our contemporary. He is perhaps even more so through his awareness of the perils. Let's listen to him:

"The essential and unquestioned maxims of European public law are few. Among the main ones is this: peace is the normal state of nations and governments. War is an exceptional fact and must have a legitimate motive. [...] These salutary maxims have been put to the harshest tests in our times. [...] We have witnessed the most immense wars undertaken without legitimate motive, by selfish and unruly ambition, or to realize arbitrary and frivolous combinations under a guise of grandeur. [...] Great governments have oppressed the independence of small nations, to maintain, both among them and themselves, the principles and forms of absolute power."

He insisted on ending on this optimistic note:

"European public law has not perished in its failures; [...] it is from its empire alone that one can hope, as much as the imperfection of human affairs permits, for the habitual maintenance of peace and mutual independence as well as the security of States."

For these few lines from a great European and the thought that inspires them, François Guizot deserved to be honored in this ministry which is still today that of Europe and Foreign Affairs. But, as I am a historian, I wish to conclude with another maxim: "[Never] in my life have I prostituted history in the service of politics," wrote Guizot. "But when history speaks, it is good for politics to listen."