

EU DISINTEGRATION AND THE REVIVAL OF NATIONALISM IN EUROPE

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The European Union (EU) is growing thinner, both in confidence and potential. The economic crisis revealed the lack of cohesion and the incapacity of the current institutional structures to deal with such an extraordinary situation. We may actually witness the demise of the Maastricht project and soon we may also realize that the erosion of the project of European integration has been going unnoticed for a long time now. The EU lost its shine and sooner or later it will lose its power of attraction. The major problem is not how the EU is viewed from the outside but how badly it fairs within. When compared with other regions and structures, the EU does not look good. Paradoxically, the Union is lacking behind its own outlook.

The deteriorating economic situation in Europe is not the cause of the ongoing disintegration of the EU; it is the epiphenomenon of the emerging structure of global political economy. That structure shifted the center of wealth and progress from West to East. This is maybe the right time to reconsider the history of Europe and decipher the effectiveness and limits of regional integration. Europe may have recovered in the aftermath of two World Wars, but this happened for certain reasons: After World War I, Europe was still the essential locus of global economic progress and growth. The wellbeing of Europe was essential for the growth of the US economy and thus America was eager to invest and lend money to Europeans. After World War II, Europe was divided in two regions that joined the US and the Soviet hegemonies respectively. The Western region was the most successful for two reasons; 1. it evolved in line with the most successful socio-political model of the time, i.e. a model that fused political liberalism, democracy and open market economy; and 2. the Eastern model was proved wanting and powerless.

Western Europe gradually detached itself from the US hegemonic structures and pursued supplementary structures in various domains such as politics and economics. The first European communities in 1950s furnished a new potential for Europe, but in retrospect Europeans overestimated and overstretched that potential. As a unique political project, European integration has some limits which shall be known by trial and error. With the benefit of hindsight, the liberal mythology of peace and prosperity through an everlasting project of economic and political integration and enlargement must be revisited. The EU is failing not just because its constituent parts lack a shared vision and competent leadership, but mostly because it crossed the limits of that integrationist model. The EU was certainly a good idea in theory, but certainly a self-effacing political experiment. Europhiles (both politicians and academics) should have taken very seriously a primary rule of social sciences which suggests that the experimental method is quite hazardous.

The historical momentum is such that we may not just witness the decline of a regional block, but the collapse of the Enlightenment project. The promise of ongoing progress and wealth under democratic regimes that protect human rights lost considerable ground to constant retreatment, less and less wealth production and less and less democracy and human rights. What is more, European nations are losing their cultural and civic identities to some post-modern institutions of cosmopolitanism such as "multiculturalism" and "trans-nationalism." That eerie idea of post-modernity was thought to be a mark of European evolution, but in reality it is a mark of decay. There are many things to regret about post-modernity, but resentment would not be the best option for the future. Europeans may need to re-discover their lost national identities. National self-awareness and pride is the key for re-engineering Europe.

Europe has a long history of resentment. Looking into that history, most catastrophes came in moments when people thought that they have transcended the threat of conflict and war. A kind reminder of the fallacious statement of Normal Angell in early 20th century that the degree of interdependence among European nations was such that war was an unprofitable enterprise may be worth noticing. Unfortunately, the chimera of internationalism and some overambitious expectations for transnational governmental institutions that will surrogate national ones make fertile ground for the resurgence of ethnic nationalism in Europe. In that case, Europe is primed to return to the ugly years of geopolitical antagonism. On that account, it is maybe the right time to work on a project that will revive and sustain civic nationalism in Europe. This may be the only chance to maintain cooperation among European states and the only prospect for pursuing some common interest among European nations. The idea that European nations may one day achieve harmony of interest must be abandoned for good.