

EUROPE: POWER OF INTENTIONS VS POWER OF CIRCUMSTANCES

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A quote often attributed to one the most powerful rulers on the Euroasian continent in the twentieth century states: "there is the power of intentions and the power of circumstances. And the power of circumstances is always stronger than the power of intentions".

Following the Brexit vote, Europe and together with it the rest of the world, have entered the new era, the significance and potential consequences of which difficult to overestimate. Therefore, how Europe will approach and handle its challenges of truly historical magnitude will affect not only this block or this continent, but also those living even on the opposite from it side of the planet.

There is no shortage of expert opinions offering analysis of Europe's current financial and economic problems. But few of them want to remind us how this project emerged from the ruins of the WW2, and which ideas and forces were shaping it.

According to almost official European historiography, following two devastating world wars, the wise men of Europe came together and in attempt to prevent repetition of the horrors of the past, put forward the Peace Project based on economic integration and common shared values.

This is true, with the exception of some small details. The Peace Project of common Europe was not really created by the *intentions* of the Europeans but was rather shaped by the *circumstances*, which were forcing the United States to push the Europeans to come and act together in exchange for massive and vital American assistance.

It is not a secret that the French, the Germans and the Italians took the initial idea of cooperation with each other almost as anathema, since each had different intentions driven by individual historical imperatives. But the emerging Soviet power in the East was leaving the US no other option but to build common West European front to counterbalance the threat. Such a geopolitical counterbalance could not be possible without Europeans rebuilding their wealth. And the only plan which could achieve prosperity and maintain the united anti-Soviet front was continental economic integration based common principals, which nowadays are mainly referred to as common shared values.

This is how the power of circumstances had overcome the power of differing European intentions and shaped what is today known as the European Union.

Having mainly outsourced their security to the United States and using economic assistance from overseas, the Europeans embarked on a journey of decades-long peace and unprecedented prosperity.

The words "peace" and "prosperity", indeed, do have very deep meaning in the context of Europe. Since the end of the WW2 till today (with the exception of the war in Yugoslavia in early 1990s), Europe lived through the longest period of uninterrupted peace in its tumultuous history. And during this period, it has managed to emerge from the ruins of the war and turn itself into the wealthiest place on the planet, which is a truly remarkable achievement by any standards.

Peace and Prosperity have become both the brand of united Europe and the object of envy and desire for billions of others around the world.

Following the collapse of the USSR, elimination of a military threat from the East and expansion of the EU to the former communist block, have inaugurated almost two decades of what will probably be remembered as the "golden era" of United Europe. For the first time, peace and prosperity were enjoyed by the majority of those living on the European peninsula. The euphoria of success, have led many EU leaders to thinking that Europe of nations-states can now be transformed into United States of Europe based on common destiny and shared values.

However, the crisis of 2008 and its consequences have uncovered deep structural flaws of the system, and most worryingly, questioned the viability of the core European idea of "common destiny and shared values".

The crisis of 2008 has shown that Europe has built its prosperity on export-oriented economy, depending on constant expansion of international markets and consumer demand. Germany, Europe's power house, generates almost half of its GDP from exports, the bulk of which goes to countries of the European free trade zone, which in turn have found themselves overburdened with public, corporate and household debts, which they are not in a position to repay.

Facing tough economic and financial problems, Europe has discovered that reaching consensus, making difficult and non-discriminating economic and political choices in the club built around principals of equality and shared destiny, is a very challenging task. And many members, especially, those in the South and the East unpleasantly found out that among equals some happen to be "more equal", and declared much-praised common values can actually be shared selectively.

For the first time in its history the EU has encountered simultaneously several interlocking problems, which it never faced before: deep economic crisis, terrorist threats caused by failed migration policy and geopolitical

risks related to growing confrontation with Russia as well as threats coming from the Middle East and North Africa.

All these challenges and threats are real and some are very dangerous with their own unpredictable dynamics. Solving these problems requires unity and strong sense of shared destiny among European states and their citizens, which so far seem to be in a very short supply, to which Brexit was the best confirmation.

Today's European leaders declare that it is their intention to stand as United Europe in the face of the challenges ahead, and preserve Europe of common Peace and Prosperity. We should all wish this to be true.

Whether the power of intentions will overcome the power of circumstances this time, remains to be seen though...