

THE STANDING OF EUROPE IN
THE NEW IMPERIAL WORLD ORDER

A Convoco Edition

CORINNE MICHAELA FLICK (ED.)

Convoco! Editions

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It is the duty of a patriot to prefer and promote the exclusive interest and glory of his native country; but a philosopher may be permitted to enlarge his views, and to consider Europe as one great republic, whose various inhabitants have attained almost the same level of politeness and cultivation. The balance of power will continue to fluctuate, and the prosperity of our own, or the neighbouring kingdoms, may be alternately exalted or depressed; but these partial events cannot essentially injure our general state of happiness, the system of arts, and laws, and manners, which so distinguish the Europeans.

Edward Gibbon (1737–1794)

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CHAPTER 1

EUROPE: IDEAS OF UNITY AND A SENSE OF CRISIS

JÖRN LEONHARD

What is Europe? What challenges does it face? And how can it exist in a world that is dominated by new competitors and the loss of many traditional certainties? Historically, Europe started out as a myth before becoming a rather vague geographical concept, and ultimately an actual space of experience. As a narrative, Europe first emerged from a myth that tells the famous tale of how Zeus/Jupiter transformed himself into a bull to carry off Europa. This was followed by many major reinterpretations that were always linked to the question of what Europe is and might

be. To this day, these questions have lost none of their explosive power.

At the end of a crisis-filled 16th century, the century of the Reformation and the wars of religion, the rulers of the Habsburg dynasty imagined Europe as a queen, a virgin whose heart belonged to the Habsburg ancestral homeland, whose head lay in Spain, and who was expected to unite Europe all the way down to Sicily. The leitmotif of this idea was a Catholic universal monarchy, combined with high hopes of securing or restoring the unity of Christendom as the unity of the West. But the Reformation, the wars of religion, and subsequent religious civil wars took precedence over these ideas, and it was actually these experiences of violence, for example during the Thirty Years' War, that defined a crisis with far-reaching consequences.

From the 18th century onwards, people began to envision Europe as a map of languages. The philosophy of the Enlightenment, cultural self-discovery through literature, the juxtaposition of individual countries' own national cultures seemed to be developing into the basis of a European form of societalization. However, the experience of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic regime gave rise to completely different ideas: at the height of Napoleon's domination of the continent and the establishment of the

Confederation of the Rhine, France held hegemonic sway over Europe. This was reflected in Napoleon's self-stylization as the successor to Charlemagne. At the same time, this provoked national resistance movements, which in many places turned into the origins of later nationalist movements. In addressing these aspirations, the 19th century developed into a period of national wars, for example in the Italian Risorgimento, which went on until 1859/61, or in the wars of 1864, 1866, and 1870/71, which created a "Lesser German" nation state under Prussian rule. For people living in the 1860s, Europe seemed at times to be a pawn in the struggle between war and peace.

However, pre-1914 Europe was much more than the mere sum of nation states and continental European empires, i.e. the Russian Tsarist Empire, the Habsburg monarchy, and the Ottoman Empire. Already before 1914, it also symbolized a kind of globalization before globalization, whose influence reached far beyond the territorial borders of European states and empires. The global network of telegraph lines before 1914, with its distinctive "highways of empire," echoed the routes of modern communications and media society, where Europe still played an important role as one of the centers of the world alongside the Americas and Asia. At the same time, given that most European countries

were monarchies, there was still hope that European dynasts and monarchs would ultimately succeed in preventing the outbreak of a major war. This Europe of dynasties, of centuries-old European princely families with their personal connections, would undergo a profound upheaval during and after World War I. In an age of ideological extremes, these experiences gave rise to completely different ideas about Europe, for example in the shape of National Socialism, whose propagandists conceived Europe's historic mission as a radical war of extermination against Bolshevism and the Jews, based on German hegemony over continental Europe.

The climax of this phase and the transformation into completely different models of European socialization after 1945 were signaled by the turning point of World War II. In September 1942 Germany's National Socialist regime and Japan's expansion into Asia and the Pacific reached their widest territorial expansion. From this moment on, a gradual erosion set in, which, after the dual defeat of Germany and Japan in 1945, enabled Europe to take on a completely different role over the long term. At the end of World War II a bipolar structure emerged in the shape of the Cold War. In Western Europe, which was not part of the bloc dominated by the Soviet Union, an

arduous path towards the first attempts at integration was emerging. After the first tentative efforts in the wake of the peace treaties of 1919, it is no coincidence that they concentrated on the communitization and internationalization of key industries. As young men, the founding fathers of the European Union Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet had watched with interest as the new world order was created at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. After 1945 it became even more important to find a way out of the highly emotional spiral of negativity, out of the permanent distrust that existed between Germany and France in particular. Although initial ideas about forming Franco-German supervisory boards in large companies, for example, had already been developed soon after 1918, it was only possible to realize such concepts after World War II in the form of the European Coal and Steel Union. Such economic and political integration formed the basis for the gradual process of political communitization. In 1973, and after the launch of the Common Market, people at that time wondered what the aim of further European integration beyond the economic rationale might be. Since then, an emotional, affective void has opened up—namely the question of which values Europe should embody beyond the rationality of the economic market.

If we look at Europe's recent history from a historical point of view, ideas of unity and a sense of crisis always go together. Against this background, we might think of Europe in terms of "axial ages." In 1949 the German philosopher Karl Jaspers argued that the period between 800 and 200 BCE was a global cultural axial age, when the Judeo-Christian tradition, Buddhism, and Islam emerged—as well as, ultimately, all the important ideas and currents of Greek philosophy. In this axial age, Jaspers writes, the secular and the divine moved apart, with the result that the god-kings and gods, who had previously been perceived as existing in the world, were no longer conceivable. This launched a development that was to be crucial for Europe, namely that political power could become the object of criticism and could be held up against superior standards.

In the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages, when the Roman Empire split in two and Europe was imagined in more territorial form for the first time, this division created a dual tension between Western and Byzantine Christianity and Church structure, and between Christianity and Islam—tensions that persist today. Both are fundamental in the history of Russia and the Ottoman Empire, as well as of modern Turkey.

In the Middle Ages, as we have already seen, a new idea of European unity emerged, based on the notion

of a Christian West and a universal monarchy. These circumstances gave rise not least to the persona of Charlemagne, as well as to self-perceptions within the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, whose representatives invoked this tradition and the continuity of empires. It was only in the 18th-century Enlightenment that a deeper sense of a special historical path for Europe would emerge for the first time. Europe appeared as an expression of history's potential for development, of historical progress, and of a special kind of modernity, on which the civilization of the whole world would necessarily be based. From this perspective, Jaspers' "axial age" links to Reinhart Koselleck's notion of *Sattelzeit* [saddle period], during which, between 1770 and 1830, the modern vocabulary of politics and society developed—the modern "isms" of liberalism, socialism, communism, modern conservatism, as well as the concepts of nation and nationalism. From about the same time, in the 1860s at the latest, a particular sense of crisis emerged, as represented by Friedrich Nietzsche's cultural criticism or Max Weber's sociological investigations of his own era. Drawing on their own contemporary experiences, both pointed to a crisis in Europe's special path, for example when Max Weber asked what were the distinguishing characteristics of the Orient

and the Occident. This latent crisis came to a head in the outbreak of World War I, in the revolutions and counter-revolutions that took place between 1917 and 1923, and in the strains on postwar societies.

The upheaval of the two world wars ushered in an intensified examination of the dichotomy-based model of center and periphery, of Europe and the world beyond its borders. Since the 1840s, the French historian and writer Alexis de Tocqueville had been asking whether modern democracy was no longer evolving in Europe, but rather in the United States. The proliferation of global centers and the multiple modernities associated with them was also a 19th-century inheritance. It is part of the prehistory of the bipolarity in which Europe looks to the United States on the one hand and to China on the other—a situation that still preoccupies us today.

So what might be defined as specific to Europe? There are, above all, six particular historical experiences of crisis that have shaped European history since the Early Modern period. At the same time, in these crisis experiences we can identify the stimuli for innovation that have characterized Europe again and again.

First, in the trauma of the religious civil wars of the 16th and 17th centuries, the unity of faith and the idea of a unifying, homogeneous West both collapsed. But

at the same time, these civil wars formed the starting point for a new way of dealing with religious diversity. The history of modern tolerance, the modern concept of sovereignty and international law, and the history of the relationship between Church and State is inconceivable without these experiences, long before the Enlightenment.

Second, in the early 18th century a new kind of differentiation between the public and private realms emerged, which would shape the notion of individual autonomy as decisively as did the culture of law as a regulatory idea.

Third, at the end of the 18th century, two revolutions broke out in the American colonies and in France. They were shaped not only by the political and constitutional sphere, linked to constitutions, the rule of law, and parliaments, but also to a social and economic dynamic that could be identified in Great Britain as early industrialization. History seemed to be malleable; it was no longer immutable fate, and it presupposed a future that was open. Reinhart Koselleck has described this using the concept of “surplus expectations” and has explained how modern “isms” arose from such experiences of surplus, from a future that was anticipated and could be foreseen. This context produced new responses to the polarization

of state and society that had been experienced in the revolutions since 1776 and 1789—not only the violent aspects of revolution, but also its reforms and the possibility of institutionalized compromise. All of this is part of the history of the impact of these revolutions. At the same time, as an expression of this particularly distinctive ambivalence, the problem of democratization emerged as a dual tension between freedom and equality and between freedom and security. Many of today's debates about the relationship between social inequality and political freedom or between personal freedom and vigilance in the age of digitalization are based fundamentally on these developments.

Fourth, as a result of industrialization and demographic change, specific social and political conflicts concerning integration developed. The range of social classes within Europe demanded new responses to the relationship between capital and labor, for example in the form of trade unions, the idea of cooperative societies, the concept of the welfare state, and debates about the limits of the market—a process that continues today and that was largely nourished by 19th-century experiences in Europe.

Fifth, in light of the new concept of sovereignty of the people, the revolutions gave rise to nations and nation states, while old empires, the Habsburg

monarchy, the Russian Tsarist empire, and the Ottoman empire were called into question by these new nation states. This development was linked to the ideal of the internal homogenization of states and societies, and to the growth of the state in the era of compulsory education, taxation, conscription, and the right to vote, and this was still based on experiences of war. But since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, important new approaches resulted from this experience of war and violence, such as the idea of a variable and flexible balance of powers to prevent efforts to achieve hegemony, the concept of modern international law, and lastly, after 1918, the idea of collective security, for example in the League of Nations and, in the long term, the United Nations. Ultimately, the European nation state of the 19th century also acted as a repository of democracy and the possibility of social mobility, of the right to vote and compulsory education, but also of compulsory military service—here too it is impossible to ignore the ambivalence of Europe, in its juxtaposition of the promise of participation and violence.

Sixth, a key feature of Europe is the story of how it grew and expanded beyond its borders before ultimately shrinking as a result of decolonization. All nation states in Europe became empire-building nation states over

the course of the 19th century. In 1914 Belgium had a colonial empire that was more than 20 times larger than Belgium itself. This imperial expansion, combined with increasing international competition, also led to the Balkan Wars of the early 20th century and these experiences fueled attempts at economic and later political integration after 1945. Thus, after 1945 and in light of the end of the European colonial regimes in Asia and Africa, European integration could become more dynamic—with Franco-German reconciliation continuously emphasized at its heart since the beginning of the 1960s. This connection can be seen in the fact that the Franco-German Élysée Treaty was concluded just one year after the Évian Accords, in which France granted Algeria independence in 1962.

But a closer look also shows how difficult it is to formulate a concise self-image for the present-day out of such points of reference. There is controversy over what ultimately constitutes Europe, and on what basis Europe should assert itself in the future. And maybe there is something productive in this debate, because it is only in this way that the achievements and risks become tangible.

A powerful narrative of peace emerged from the ongoing success story of 70 years of peace created by European integration. After the world wars, Europe

became a realm of peace like no other in modern history. This peacekeeping role was very successful on three occasions: after 1945, in leading West Germany politically, economically, and mentally out of the catastrophe of National Socialism and the isolation of the postwar period; in the reintegration of authoritarian states and societies such as Greece, Spain, and Portugal since the 1970s; and again after the end of the Cold War in 1989/90 through the eastward expansion of the European Union. However, the concept of Europe as a “benevolent empire” that is incapable of a war of aggression and successfully keeps the peace on its borders is now reaching its limits, whether in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, today in Eastern Ukraine, the Near and Middle East, or in North Africa. As rich as the story we have outlined here may be, it is no guarantee that Europe is capable of permanent self-renewal.

The path from Europe in around 1500, a patchwork territory of over 400 sovereign entities, via the long road to the Maastricht Treaty was time and again marked by incisive reallocations of lands that repeatedly went hand in hand with war and violence, whether between 1792 and 1815 or after 1918 and after 1945. But this is a story of waves of innovation and learning processes just as much as of ambivalences

and problematic legacies. Throughout its history, Europe has been an ambiguous entity that cannot be determined by territorial unity but rather by experiences of conflict and a permanent engagement with political, social, and economic models and cultural interpretations.

That is why it is so fundamentally important to understand the historical differences behind the rhetoric of integration, and not smooth them out. For example, France became a nation state with defined borders at a relatively early stage, while Poland lost its statehood at the end of the 18th century, did not regain it until after 1918—and only won full sovereignty again after the end of the Cold War in 1989/91. This explains the many reservations about an excessive transfer of sovereignty rights in the context of the European Union. The legacy of diversity is also evident on other levels, as Europe contains at least three legal traditions in the forms of Roman and Germanic law as well as English common law. How on earth can a common European legal culture be created from this? We have to tolerate these differences and not level them prematurely if we want to make progress towards a new European core.

There has always been a particular connection between the experience of crises and the debate about

the value of Europe. For example, it was no accident that the question of a European identity intensified during the 1970s, when the economic boom was subsiding and the oil crisis revealed the vulnerability of the economy. While European integration facilitated the peaceful end of the Cold War in 1989, since then global conflicts have jeopardized Europe's historical peace project. This became apparent after the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008 and the intensification of foreign policy crises since 2014—from Russia's annexation of Crimea and the "Cold Peace" between the United States and Russia, via the refugee crisis and its many social consequences, to the crisis year of 2016 with the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump, which accelerated the end of the era of the United States as Europe's protective power. This development is interwoven with the rise of China to the status of a global economic power. The underlying question is whether an authoritarian state economy based on one-party rule and the extensive control of individual rights is ultimately superior to the liberal, democratic model and a form of capitalism that is contained by society.

Will Europe remain stuck in a form of strategic defensiveness that it cannot currently transcend? Despite all the criticism, Europe's potential for

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Will Europe remain stuck in a form of strategic defensiveness that it cannot currently transcend? Despite all the criticism, Europe's potential for

innovation based on a liberal system, its importance as an economic market, and its achievement as the most successful modern-day peace project offer ways of building a positive narrative with which people can identify. It is no coincidence that so many people from the world's crisis regions are still risking their lives to reach this kind of Europe.

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