



International Paneuropean Union

THE EUROPEAN UNION and TODAY'S INCREASED THREATS

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"The world gets smaller every day". This statement was made by Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi in his book Paneuropa, designed for young Europeans, as far back as 1923. He went on to say that "every European holds part of the destiny of the world in his hands."

Almost a century has elapsed since this prophetic call, during which Europe has successively suffered the worst tragedies of its long history and the happiest promises of a new renaissance offered by the achievements and prospects of the European Union.

When the Soviet empire fell, Mikhail Gorbachev nevertheless warned us: "We have done the most terrible thing to you that we could possibly have done. We have deprived you of an enemy."

Yet, in this second decade of the twenty-first century, Europe is facing the emergence of new threats. "I have defined our era", declared Pope Francis, "as a time of war, a piecemeal World War Three..."

These threats, which are as much of internal origin as emanating from our neighbours, both in the south and east, could not only undermine the operation and very existence of the European Union but, worse still, erode the very foundations of European civilisation.

With Greco-Latin and Judeo-Christian founding roots, imbued with Muslim culture in Spain and the Balkans, European civilisation became secularised under the influence of humanism, the Enlightenment and progressive dechristianisation.

With the influx of ongoing immigration since decolonisation and the proliferation of conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Western Asia, Europe has become partially Islamised, no longer as a result of conquering invasions but through the contribution of Muslims to meet economic needs and requests for political asylum.

The rise of national populism has gradually increased since the 2008 crisis, with voices raised against the European Union, citing, among other things, the constraints it entails for the countries of the Eurozone.

Although this hostility is manifested by various challenges, which differ between Member States, it is now spreading throughout the European Union in the form of populist demagoguery and nationalist claims to supposedly solve the identity, political, economic and social issues of European people. Xenophobia is now spreading more and more like wildfire.

While all European countries are affected, two countries in particular symbolise this anti-European evolution: Greece, because of the social and political consequences of its financial situation, and Great Britain, which still seems to be questioning its membership of the European Union forty-three

years after signing the Treaty of Rome. The Greeks, like the British, must before long choose where their future lies. For the former, it is a question of whether they are prepared to implement the unavoidable constraints of a common currency and, for the latter, whether they are willing to commit to an independent Europe and, above all, one of solidarity.

History has written in letters of blood that nationalism is war. Have Europeans already forgotten that the desire for Europe was initially a way to entrench peace between them, in the face of their incessant disputes over units of sovereignty in the same space, from the Atlantic to the Urals?

As global powers, European states colonised and shaped the world until the dawn of the twentieth century. It was the two world wars, born of their conquering rivalries, which reduced them to submission to the main winners.

Today, the population growth of Asia, the Americas and Africa, accompanied by the emergence of new powers and universal economic development, has significantly reduced the share that goes to Europe, along with its influence.

The weight of energy in the global economy, the trade it engenders and its consequences on climate change and pollution, has contributed to making the whole planet interdependent. Europe is more aware of this than any other continent, and could stake out an exemplary path on this new and decisive ground for the future of humanity.

The new information and communication technologies have transformed global connections on a political, economic and cultural level. They have dramatically increased universal relationships, both human and commercial. In addition, they have given the United States in particular - a pioneer in this field, where the main innovative companies in this sector are established - new powers of supervision, surveillance and intervention, including military, over the whole the international community, and especially Europe.

It is thus in this context that Europe, if it wants to meet the demands and constraints of the twenty-first century, must assert itself, both internally and externally, as a united power - free, independent and sovereign in the areas its nations have entrusted to it.

To tackle the new threats they are facing, Europeans must set themselves mobilising goals that will allow them to protect their fundamental spiritual and humanistic values, participate in peace and universal progress, preserve their social lives and guarantee their collective security.

Since, first and foremost, it is in Europe that they must act.

The crisis imported from the United States in the first decade of the twenty-first century was not handled by the European institutions as befitted its severity.

Although the Member States used the means provided by the Treaties and added to these new instruments, particularly with regard to finance and banking, they did not put enough emphasis on common responses. Without a real concerted, close economic outlook, shared budgetary discipline, harmonised tax systems and social protection, it is no wonder that we have seen such distortions between Member States' performances with regard to employment, foreign trade, or compliance with the Maastricht criteria and sovereign debt.

Also seriously lacking is the implementation of a European energy policy, since this would have allowed Europe to avoid conflicting choices and thus favoured the guarantee of supply through more balanced exchanges, including financial, between producers outside the Union and European

consumers. And why do the countries of the Eurozone still fail to make the decision to pay for their purchases of raw materials in their own currency?

To respond and move forward, experience has shown that, sixty-four years after the creation of the first supranational institution, Europe has had to continue to prioritise reliance on cooperation between governments.

The European Council has thus established itself as the privileged arena for the governance of the Union. And it is obvious that the European Commission is still not regarded by the people of Europe as a sufficiently representative and democratic institution to take decisions on their behalf with the most political consequences.

The orientations of the European Commission - particularly liberal, systematically hostile to the intervention of the Member States in economic life and opposing the formation of large European companies, even to bring themselves up to the same level as their worldwide competitors - have contributed to weakening Europe in global competition. Added to this is a recurring criticism of excessive regulation, inversely proportional to the absence of Europe on issues regarding its policy and external security.

Despite the considerable assistance provided by the Union to the development of new Member States, the European regulations in a multitude of areas, often inspired by specific interests, have helped make the EU unpopular, including in areas where its intervention has been positive overall, such as the environment, food security or even agriculture.

In 2014, a new European Parliament was elected and the new European Commission committed to fostering investment in research, innovation and infrastructure to boost the economy. These good intentions must, as a matter of urgency, become concrete, bringing with them renewed growth in the European Union, with practical, perceptible effects, especially on employment.

The crisis also revealed to Europeans that the standard of living they had achieved and the social protection they enjoyed could be challenged. Faced with the disparity of efforts required to overcome this, resentments manifested themselves, both in those who managed to obtain favourable results and those who found these efforts excessive, or even unbearable.

Whether or not they are Schengen members, all European states are subject to irresistible pressure from immigrants. Since there is no genuine common policy, each country has had to address this issue for itself, as a matter of urgency and according to its own interests, resources and geography, with Southern European countries particularly exposed to mass arrivals of immigrants by sea.

Whether these relate to humanitarian situations, political asylum or economic necessity, Europe must no longer delay in making the required provisions. These provisions must have a defensive side, to protect against the traffickers who profit from human misery. Every effort must also be made to help maintain these populations in their home countries. But Europeans must, nevertheless, organise themselves for the inevitable reception of some of these desperate individuals in the Member States with the greatest need, demographically and economically.

Although, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the past conflicts deriving from the dismantling of the countries of the former Yugoslavia have disappeared, Russia's reconquering of former territories of the Soviet Union has not allowed peace to settle permanently in Europe and its eastern neighbours. In Moldova, Georgia, then Ukraine, the interventions carried out, directly or indirectly, on the initiative of the Russian President in violation of the borders recognised by the International Community, have led to concern over the escalating threats of war in these areas.

The continuation of the excessive influence of the United States, especially over Central and Eastern Europe, has also exacerbated disputes with a Russia humiliated at the end of the Cold War. Yet a new European geopolitical vision should encourage Russia and the European Union to foster cooperation with their neighbouring countries around mutual interests, both political and economic.

Despite the current reluctance to further enlargement of the European Union, it would be unfair to refuse to extend this to the countries of south-east Europe that are not yet members, if there is a change in the accession criteria. Europeans also need to know their boundaries to better identify with the Union.

We are aware, moreover, that the major global challenges of this century will revolve much more around the countries of the Pacific and Indian Oceans than on the shores of the North Atlantic and Mediterranean.

This is why the European Union should be fully involved in the solutions to the ongoing turmoil in the Maghreb, Africa, the Near and Middle East, especially given the increase in the destructive power of radical Islam and its influence on the countries of Europe adjacent to terrorist routes.

In this period, where peace is being threatened once more, we do not need less of Europe. On the contrary, our need for a strong, respected Europe, sure of itself and united in solidarity, has never been greater.

Admittedly, the European Commission and Parliament could also reduce their regulatory ambitions where these are not essential and, above all, allow the Member States to take responsibility for what they know better than the Union. In contrast, Europeans have an urgent duty to implement a military organisation capable of ensuring their own defence, since it is obvious that NATO cannot always guarantee it.

But the absolute priority is to bring young people on board, encouraging them to seize upon the European ambition as the only one able, by overcoming individual and national adventures, however legitimate they may be, to give meaning to the founding values of our civilization. A united Europe, respectful of the differences that make it up, will be stronger in the face of universal competition. It is cohesion and solidarity among Europeans that will give them back the desire to collectively face the threats of the twenty-first century.

Although secularism, i.e. the strict separation between religions and states, is imposing itself, we are well aware that spiritual beliefs remain present and influential, including in Europe.

It is therefore up to Paneuropeans who believe in the values of the Gospel to affirm their beliefs with courage and determination, in the knowledge that, as predicted by the great French writer André Malraux: "The twenty-first century will be religious or it will not be at all".

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