

Europe's Fate in a Changing World

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to analyze the current economic and political situation of the European Union (EU), in the given changing international landscape. The paper contains two parts. In the first part, the analysis is focused on the current problems the EU is facing now with the war between Russia and Ukraine, and the fights in Israel. Also, it is analyzed the position of the EU with respect to the USA. The most important issue is the economic gap between the Western countries and the East-South countries. That generates many frustrations in poor countries' populations. A second significant issue is the decreasing demography of Europe. The second part of the paper focuses on the possible solutions the leaders of the EU may consider in order to align it to the initial vision of the EU founders.

Keywords: European Union, political analysis, economic analysis, international changes, populism

Introduction

The inherent difficulties of the EU, and later of the Eurozone, as a result of the grave errors that sealed its constitution, precluded from the outset the possibility of realizing its initial promises (rapid growth, reduction of inequalities, full employment, peace, and monetary stability). Among the many consequences of the EU's dysfunction, the most dramatic is the rupture between the rich European North and the poor and indebted South, sealed by the Stability Pact (Negroponti-Delivanis, 2012). And in terms of the EU's position on the international stage, its complete failure to secure an independent voice and policy vis-à-vis the United States, despite having been the dominant reason for its creation, justifies the profound disappointment of its late visionary, Jacques Delors, and more.

Despite its serious flaws, the EU has so far managed to survive and, above all, not be threatened with dissolution, at least not in the immediate future, thanks to its flexible capabilities. This is mainly due to the prudent and generally successful choices made by the leaders of each of its member states, who accept in advance and without hesitation the task of supporting its political choices and protecting it as much as possible from whatever threatens it. Even if this blind loyalty sometimes goes against the interests of the individual member states, but ultimately also against its "longevity". As it turns out, these rotating leaders have so far proved capable of convincing the people of the member states that, despite the EU's ever-increasing problems, it is better to stay in the EU than to leave it. I would also add that the general and accelerating decline of the West inevitably affects the quality of EU officials. These mainly long-term consequences of the West's progressive decline have recently been aggravated by the negative effects, especially in the case of Europe, of the war in Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas war, and, more recently, the events in the Red Sea. The

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crowning glory of all these unfavorable developments is the critical situation in which the hitherto very resilient German economy has found itself.

And, as was to be expected, the decadent West, in addition to the negative effects that are crushing it, has proved completely unprepared for the onslaught of the inherent upheavals that are rapidly changing the international economic order and the ideological bases of its governance and decisions.

And if the specter of the EU's disintegration has so far not directly threatened it, the trend towards increasingly unfavorable conditions for the West and for itself justifies fears about the risks of its disintegration. In Part I of my analysis, I will address these new threats to the EU, while in Part II I will unfold recent efforts to save the EU. Finally, in the conclusion, I will try to summarize the pros and cons and predict, as far as possible, the fate of the EU.

The deadly dangerous reversals

The EU has entered an extremely difficult period, as the persistent inefficiency of its functioning and its often disappointing decisions are compounded by extremely dangerous reversals, both at the national and international levels, which are extremely dangerous for its very existence.

A. The new risks at the national level

The risks to the survival of the EU are numerous and new ones are constantly being added. The threats I have chosen to discuss below are certainly not the only ones, but in my opinion they are the most representative.

Populist Governments. The greatest threat to the EU, I would say without a doubt, is the emergence and rapid expansion in Europe and the world of what mainstream/traditional governments call populist, far-right, and non-systemic governments. In fact, in the last 20 years or so, new parties have emerged in the political space of Europe and beyond, with characteristics that are significantly different from their systemic, right-wing, centrist, and left-wing counterparts. This new trend in Europe has been observed since the end of the 2008 financial crisis. The EU is literally terrified as it watches their rapid expansion and replacement of traditional governments, which explains the names and labels that are being hurled at them to mock, demean, ridicule, or even point out the supposed danger of these new and emerging political parties. Among the labels indiscriminately hurled at these newly formed parties are those of "far right", "populist", "conservative", "non-progressive", "backward" and "dangerous to democracy".

In this regard, I would like to emphasize that populist parties are theoretically both right-wing and left-wing, although this classical distinction has become blurred. The differences between them are minimal and mainly concern immigration policy. Right-wing governments are critical or even hostile to the migratory wave, while left-wing governments are more tolerant of it (although even this difference has recently narrowed considerably). Moreover, all non-systemic parties oppose globalization, the elite, permanent austerity, and extreme forms of liberalism, and favor an interventionist state to redistribute income, as well as the nation-state and traditional values. In particular, the right and left non-systemic parties are in favor of a fairer distribution of income and in favor of interventionism. In general, the newly formed parties promise to do everything that the systemic parties have promised and failed to do.

This is because more and more governments in Europe are already in danger of not only following in the footsteps of Hungary and Poland (Negroponti-Delivanis, 2023b), but also proposing to leave the EU and the euro. Already 15 of the 27 EU member states have parties whose views are shared by at least 20% of the population, so it will no longer be Orbán who leads the disobedience, but most of Europe. The leaders of the EU, France, and Germany, with their parties that are collectively (but in my opinion unjustifiably) called far-right and fascist, are on their way to governing their countries, and there is a widespread fear that Meloni of Italy is also limping along for the time being, waiting for reinforcements to defend her original beliefs, i.e. to leave the euro and the EU. It is precisely at this time that questions about the exact location of the EU's sovereign power are coming to a head. The recent election in the Netherlands of Mr. Wilders, who is likely to lead a coalition government and is ideologically close to Marine Le Pen, has literally culminated the fears of the EU (Negroponti-Delivanis, 2023b). The expansion and strengthening of these political parties will certainly be reinforced by the very likely re-election of Donald Trump as President of the United States.

Demographics. One of the most decisive signs of the now uncontrollable decline is the demographic decline that Europe is experiencing. Its population is shrinking by about two million people a year and is constantly being replaced by immigrants (Negroponti-Delivanis, 2018). By 2050 it is expected to be no more than 420 million. Europe is thus planning its end as it ages without renewing its generations. Instead, it is welcoming mass immigration from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia to replace the native Europeans, bringing with them cultures with radically different values on the relationship between the sexes, political power, culture, the economy, and the relationship between God and man. Europe is thus disappearing through the modernist theory of Coudenhove Kalergi. If these trends are not controlled, in the near future, according to Coudenhove Kalergi's predictions, the population of Europe will turn into something resembling ancient Egyptians with black hair and a big nose (Negroponti-Delivanis, 2012a).

B. The dangers ahead at the international level

But also in the international arena, inherent reversals are taking place, preparing the succession of world domination, namely the end of the hegemony of the West and the rise of the secular power of the South (or, otherwise, of the East). Despite these undeniable developments, Mr. Biden insists on perceiving American leadership of the world as secure for the distant future as well.

The New International Order. Within two years (2009-2011), a group of non-Western countries created BRICS. Initially, there were five countries, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, to which five more have recently been added, namely Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and Iran, with others in the queue, the first being Indonesia. All these states, without having specific and, above all, common positions at the moment, are nevertheless taking a general stance against the West, accusing it of unilateralism and heralding the advent of a new international order. The dominant element of this emerging new order will be multilateral rather than unilateral governance of the world. From this new order comes the promise of its future leaders that there will no longer be an effort to satisfy and serve only the interests of the great powers, but instead there will be respect and equality for all countries of the world, their cultures, and religions, according to the Chinese president.

The BRICS are already attracting more than 20 new member states from the Global South. By contrast, the West is having obvious difficulties in attracting new members and imposing its views. The failure of the G20 meeting in New Delhi on September 10 to reach an agreement on the content of a statement at the end of the meeting, in which the West insisted that only Russia should be condemned for the war in Ukraine and that Ukraine should be exonerated, can be seen as evidence of the subversive processes at the international level. In the end, the will of the countries of the South prevailed, and the relevant statement attributed equal responsibility for the war to Russia and Ukraine (Foy, Reed, Politi & Leahy, 2023). It should also be noted that no country outside the West imposed sanctions against Russia, while the war in Ukraine accelerated the division between the West and the South. On the basis of 30 polls, in which 137 countries or 97% of the world's population participated, it can be concluded that the war in Ukraine has divided the world into two camps of roughly equal quantitative strength, the first being pro-American and anti-Russian, the second being pro-Russian or neutral but still anti-Western. It goes without saying that the pro-Western populations belong to the category of economically advanced countries, while the pro-Russian populations belong to the category of developing countries.

This division seems to be mainly ideological, since the West claims to serve liberal democracy, with respect for the values of individual freedom, while the South has generally embraced forms of illiberal democracy. However, liberal democracy, even though conflicts are waged in its name to bring deviant populations under its sway, represents an increasingly smaller percentage of the world's population and could be seen as a consequence of the West's declining influence, as are the findings that follow. In particular, relevant research concludes that the percentage of the world's population living under conditions of illiberal democracy will be 46% in 2012 and 72% in 2022. It is also interesting to note that in Europe, 62% of the population is against Russia, but not against China. Moreover, 62% declare that they would like to remain neutral in the event of a conflict between the USA and China (Caldwell, 2023).

Europe's position. The war in Ukraine has revealed the serious weaknesses of the European economy, due to its high dependence on Russian energy, its lack of an economic policy independent of that of the USA, and its own weaknesses in modernization, especially in the field of new technologies (Erlanger & Satariano, 2020). Moreover, the 60-year-old friendship between France and Germany, the founding fathers of the EU, has been severely damaged. For example, Macron's proposal to adopt a European defense policy was ignored by Germany because the latter turned to the United States and not to France to ensure its defense with F-35 planes, and also because Germany, ignoring France, announced its unilateral decision to spend 200E billion to cope with high energy costs.

One of the most serious consequences of the war in Ukraine is, therefore, the realization by each of the countries of Europe that peace is not a given, as they had naively believed before the war in Ukraine, and that it is, therefore, necessary for each country to take care of its defense. Thus, instead of taking care of its development, which has been limping along for 12 years, Europe is spending heavily on defense (Cohen & Alderman, 2023). In 2022 in particular, and for the eighth year in a row, global defense spending will be higher than at any time since the Cold War. It is estimated to amount to 2.2% of world GDP. In Europe, the main producers of military equipment are the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. In order to ease their consciences, the countries that supply Kiev with military equipment sign the

following declaration: "To carry arms in a country that is defending itself legitimately is not to be belligerent" (Leymaire, 2024).

Moreover, the fact that the sanctions against Russia ultimately did not affect Europe at all should be considered a serious moral and economic blow for Europe. This is because Russia was able to quickly channel oil and gas to the East, but also because it was thoroughly prepared for similar sanctions even from Crimea in 2014 (Negroponti-Delivanis, 2022). On the contrary, Europe suffered serious blows that are expected to be long-lasting, as it was forced to reduce its gas consumption by 50-60 cubic meters, mainly in its industrial sector, which resulted in a reduction of its competitiveness. As a result, many European companies have closed down, while others have relocated to the United States or Eurasia. In several cases, moreover, the resumption of coal production was considered inevitable in Europe, even though it was highly risky for green growth.

Europe's inability to foresee the disastrous consequences of sanctions against Russia and the unhesitating application of the corresponding US options are reflected in the critical situation in which the flagship of the European economy, Germany, has found itself. Unfortunately, it seems inevitable that the harsh standards of the new international order, which are harsh for Europe, do not leave much room for optimism, but neither does it leave much hope that Europe, if it adopts a more successful strategy for the future, will be able to reverse the decline of its international importance.

Beyond the current picture, which is spontaneously projected into the future, serious predictions for the not-too-distant future, say 2050, lead us to a new, perhaps painful reality, which no effort on our part seems capable of changing. In fact, according to serious predictions for 2050, the top of the world will no longer be dominated by America, but by China, followed immediately by India, and only in third place by America. In terms of the percentage of each country's GDP in 2050, compared to 2016, China will have risen from 18% to 20% and India from 7% to 15%. In contrast, the EU-27 will have shrunk from 15% to 9% and the US from 16% to 12%. Moreover, in 2040, no European country, and certainly not the US, will be in the G7 of the world's most powerful countries. The G7 of 2015 (US, UK, France, Germany, Japan, Canada and Italy) will be replaced by the G7 of China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Russia, Mexico and Turkey.

Recent EU Rescue Efforts

Although, by all appearances, Europe failed to anticipate the rapid changes in the economic landscape in time, it is not accepting the reality that is unfavorable to it, as several indications show. In fact, Europe is not discouraged. One of the first reactions of Europe to its marginalization is the attempt to build a new nationalism.

A. Resorting to outdated solutions

The EU is making significant revisions to its original ideological preferences, including adopting protectionist measures in its international trade, in an attempt to increase its degree of self-sufficiency at home, but also promoting state intervention in the economy, in areas such as green growth, among others, in order not to lag behind other countries outside Europe. Beyond these efforts, however, it is worth highlighting the truly desperate attempt to revive a period of industrialization that began in the United States, where 5% of GDP has already been spent in this direction. It was only to be expected that Europe would follow in a broader effort to reduce its dependence, thanks to an increase in the degree of self-sufficiency and the creation of

new jobs. For Europe in particular, it is hoped that these efforts will increase the share of industrial production to 25% of value added. Although it is difficult to predict the results of this unorthodox effort, the very different conditions of today compared to those of the period of industrialization considerably limit optimistic expectations.

B. Adoption of non-democratic methods

In recent years, Germany, with the support of the powerful economies of northern Europe, has sought to eliminate the right of veto within the EU at all costs, in order to make its decisions supposedly faster and easier (Negroponti-Delivanis, 2023b). The existence of this democratic instrument was still a source of irritation, despite the serious mutilation it suffered in the process. The maintenance of the veto, even in this weakened form, seems to be due to the fear of serious reactions from the South, and not only from the "bad boys" of Europe (see Hungary and, until recently, Poland). These, in principle, justified hesitations on the part of the EU's governing body were dispelled in the blink of an eye in order to urgently secure the accession of Ukraine and Moldova to the EU. In other words, the possibility that the accession of these countries, and not only their accession, could be jeopardized by the veto of certain member states was considered unacceptable.

Let me remind you that on November 2, 2002, 17 foreign ministers and 11 state secretaries met in Berlin at the invitation of the Foreign Minister. They were mainly representatives of the European North, but also representatives of candidate countries such as Ukraine and Turkey. The main topic of this meeting was the abolition of unanimity in favor of a special majority, which was in fact the prologue to the abolition of the veto.

The effective abolition of the veto was achieved by a resolution and under the umbrella of the immediate need to reform the EU treaties in order to "face the future of an enlarged Europe". 267 proposals for revision were presented. The most widespread are those that reinforce the promiscuity within the EU and further limit the reach of the poor South vis-à-vis the rich West. The absence of any reaction from the European South against the hasty decision to abolish it is surprising. It is understandable to be surprised by the inexplicable of the only democratic weapon still at its disposal.

C. Enlargement

The enlargement of the EU from 27 to 36 members, to which the EU is now rushing (abolition of the veto), is justified by the hope that the abolition of the veto will facilitate decision-making. However, France's concerns that the large number of members could make the system unmanageable do not seem to have been taken seriously. It is believed that the nine additional members will be admitted to the EU on a fast-track basis so as not to continue to be exposed to the risk of Russian influence. In particular, it is felt that the accession of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia should be accelerated because Russian troops on their territory threaten to destabilize Europe. The EU therefore considers it inconceivable that their accession to the EU should be jeopardized or even prevented by a possible veto by Hungary or Poland. It should be noted, however, that not all EU candidates enjoy the same degree of sympathy: Serbia, a candidate since 2012, has been denied entry on the grounds that it has not fulfilled the necessary reforms. And according to polls, a significant portion of the population there no longer wants membership. However, the tumultuous changes in Europe's political space raise the agonizing question of how and whether the EU can finally be saved by lifting the veto, ridding it of recalcitrant

members like Hungary and Poland, and enlarging it. This is because it is being flooded by the new non-systemic political parties.

Incidentally, it is worth noting that these new political parties are collectively labeled as extreme right-wing by their political opponents, i.e. the mainstream parties, in order to exclude and stigmatize all forms of party nationalism. Precisely for this reason, efforts are being made so that the labels neo-Nazi and neo-fascism are now used exclusively for parties and groups that explicitly declare their desire to restore the Third Reich or cite historical National Socialism as their ideological influence. They are therefore not "fascist" and "right-wing extremist" parties or governments, as traditional governments, panicked by their rise, like to call them. On the contrary, they are political formations, with non significant differences between them, belonging to the right as well as to the left, and whose name is appropriately called "anti-systemic". They promise, if they come to power, to do everything that the systemic/traditional governments have failed to do. The already visible danger for the EU, however, is the fact that many of these new parties have promised that if they come to power they will hold a referendum on leaving the EU and the euro.

Conclusion

The proliferating and intensifying dangers surrounding the future of the EU cannot be addressed by abolishing the veto, nor by enlargement, nor by a shift to less democratic and more authoritarian methods. On the contrary, I would argue that the EU would face fewer problems in number and severity if it tried more decisively and effectively to resolve its chronic and thorny problems, including: a) its absolute dependence on the U.S., whose interests do not always coincide with European interests; b) the growing inequalities between the North and the South of Europe; c) finding (although difficult) a less dangerous institutional framework than the Stability Pact for the management of the euro, which does not condemn the EU to permanent austerity and therefore economic stagnation; d) to tackle the migratory wave in a collective manner for the whole of Europe, ensuring equal opportunities and risks for all Member States; e) ensure a higher degree of democracy in practice and not just in theory, which would require a referendum on all serious, controversial and sensitive issues.

Apart from the above observations/suggestions, it is of course necessary to recall that, given that Europe is part of the wider West, there seems to be no other evolutionary path than the one that would drag the whole West into decline. Civilizations are not eternal and the maximum time limit of their existence is about 200 years. However, the current status quo can continue for decades, during which it is necessary to address the problems of the EU and try to solve them as far as possible.

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