

The European Population is relatively unconcerned about security

The lack of will to be a greater power

by Christoph Nick, Journalist, Brussels

Since 2008 at the latest, crisis has become the most familiar word in politics: financial crisis, economic crisis, Greek debt crisis, euro crisis, NATO in crisis, etc. Nowhere in the western world in general and in Europe in particular are politicians and people talking first and foremost about solutions, challenges and opportunities. It is significant that name coined for the fundamental political crisis in the Arab states, which runs much deeper than Europe's various crises, is one that expresses hope: the Arab spring. It is too easy to say that in the Arab countries the young generation is standing up against old dictatorships and that an ageing European population is not ready to cope with future challenges. What really makes the difference is the fact that the Arabs have a vision of the future, be it modern democracy or Islamist fundamentalism, and that the Europeans only have a vision of the past.

Europe needs more common sense

2012 is the fourth year of the most severe economic crisis since 1929. Compare 2012 to 1933 and you know that we are doing not too badly. But, we are not doing well either. The very diverse problems facing the Europeans have one thing in common: the best solution lies in more supranational cooperation and in giving up more of one's national sovereignty. What is true for the economy is also true for the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy. European integration has reached a crucial point. Either nations or people go further towards the long proposed ever closer union – a United States of Europe – or the European Union will fall back on more intergovernmentalism, a proven means for not solving the existing problems.

The trouble is that nobody apart from enthusiasts wants a United States of Europe. Timothy Garton Ash, the renowned British historian, stated in 2011 in an interview with the German weekly *Der Spiegel* that Europeans are still doing too well to be ready for more radical steps. Almost a year ago

outgoing US Defense Secretary Robert Gates deplored Europe's demilitarisation and Europeans' unwillingness and incapacity to defend themselves.

The recent threat, in Soviet style, of Russia's Chief of the General Staff Nikolai Makarov to, maybe, attack NATO missile defence installations in the European Union once put in place went largely unnoticed or was not taken seriously. The Russian criticism of NATO missile defence boils down to the fact that Russia wants to be completely unhindered in her capacity to eradicate Europe with her strategic missiles. Europeans do not even dare to discuss this in public. George Friedman, founder and CEO of STRATFOR, predicts in his book "The Next 100 Years", published in 2009, that Russia will try to expand westwards again and that the Baltic States will be the first victims.

The dilemma faced by the French and British in 1939 – whether or not die for Poland – and their negative answer before they themselves were attacked a year later might have inspired Friedman.

Time for Europeans to decide their future

The Second World War was the aftermath of an economic crisis. Politics gave the wrong answers after 1929, and not only in Germany. The Europeans might miss their chance this time as well. In 1950, Robert Schuman was ready to give up France's sovereignty over her coal and steel resources in order to prevent Germany from regaining hers. In the fifties coal and steel were seen as decisive for winning wars. Today, pooling economic sovereignty would be a smart answer to the European debt crisis and creating a truly European army would lead to a smart defence that can practise what it preaches. Strong national interests are working against these two obvious solutions. The British are not willing to give up what they already lost decades ago, the French believe that they are being truly European when fighting for their own interests and the Germans have delved so much into the 12 dark years that they are not willing to give up Parliament's right of say over the use of German soldiers to an institution that they cannot control entirely.

The European Union is not ready to cope with the multiple crises it faces. No head of state or foreign minister is painting a bright European future for the Europeans by proposing to create political union and a common army now. When they are ready to go for it, it may be too late. Europe is lacking the will to decide its own destiny.



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