

Round table

"The question of European integration in the light of the Ukrainian crisis"

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"ANXIETY IN THE AGE OF UNCERTAINTY AND THE LATEST INTERNAL EUROPEAN WAR"

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In its history, Europe had periods of so-called external and internal wars. In the early Middle Ages (and before that period), still unsettled, Europe and its dynasties and armies of the time led mainly external (defensive) wars against various non-European invasions (for example, wars against the Avars, the Saracens/Arab Mongols, and much later the Turks). After successful defence mutual disputes and conflicts of European dynasties followed, and then the era of internal continental wars was made, which was ripping Europe apart throughout the centuries. In the last few decades of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century (with the exception of the Balkan geographical area), was marked by relative peace and strong colonial expansion of Western European nations towards Africa and Asia, i.e. the projection of power on long distances. It could be defined as an era of dominance of purely external wars (there were periods when external and internal wars were equally present - approximately from 16th to 19th centuries). The First and Second World War were the biggest internal wars in Europe continent from which Europe emerged weakened, and its largest nations were in an inferior position against one Eurasian - Russia and one North American power - USA. During the Cold War, apart from the armed conflict, two conflicting camps (communist and capitalist) had each kind of possible struggle - diplomatic, political, ideological, propaganda, psychological, even symbolic. With the end of the Cold War, with the exception of the area of the former SFRY (1991-2001), it is relatively peaceful in Europe and then it, as an assistant to the USA, leads external wars again (Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Sahel), and again, although as a "minority shareholder" Europe projects its limited power, far beyond its borders. With the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, that period was slowly closing, and in 2022 it is definitely ended. Europe is at war again. Almost all Western and Central European countries, along with the states of the former USSR, lined up against the Russian Federation.

Anxiety in an age of uncertainty stems from misjudgements and wrong expectations. Russian military power was overestimated in the West (not only in material terms, but in intelligence, doctrinal and logistical terms aspect), and the Russian economy was underestimated (its size was contemptuously compared to the Italian, but the specific content of that 2% of world GDP was forgotten). The reality mostly denied those assessments. Many experts were upset. The Russian army is not excelling, but the economy is still doing well and keeps on its feet. In fact, a Russian triumph on the battlefield would brought relief to the European states that are currently fiercely against Moscow - the situation on the field, as it is, would have been accepted, and the conscience would be clean, because significant military aid was sent to Kiev, and millions of Ukrainians were accepted and hosted. And once again economic flows, interrupted due to Western sanctions, would slowly be restored, and Russian gas and oil flowed smoothly. In strategy, as well as in politics, let me quote a famous Russian strategist Svechin: " Hens often hatch ducklings - consequences may prove to be quite unlike to the causes which gave rise to them". Major mistakes in Moscow's political and military planning obscure the end of the war, as Europeans are expecting a hard and challenging winter, and restrictions in the everyday life of an

average person, which are not remembered since the end of the Second World War. The British, as well as the USA, eternal speculators of European politics, are rubbing their hands.

And the anxiety of uncertainty emerges from the question - whether the EU will expand in the age of this crisis. But that seems to be a secondary issue. The real issue is - will the EU survive at all, and if so, how and in what form? The second question is no less intriguing - does the EU even deserve to survive if it obviously cannot, at least so far, establish itself as an independent global pole of power, alongside the USA and China?

There is no authentic European foreign policy - what it is today is just one variety of the American view of the modern world today. There is no true European defence policy either – its all indications, offshoots and shy, almost invisible manifestations have been drowned in the Euro-Atlantic platform embodied by NATO. Europe/EU is neither politically nor militarily independent, and due to lack of energy, there is a danger that it will become less and less economically relevant.

The defeat of Russia could save the European Union from the risk of social unrest and political conflicts - throwing Russia back into the nineties of the last century, into the status of a supplier of cheap energy sources and consumers of European products, and a mute observer of political conditions and processes in Eurasia, that barely keeps together all their political subjects (we should not forget - Russia is a federation).

What would that mean for the Serbs? The defeat of Russia would mean the loss of the only interlocutor among the major players who has an understanding of the Serbian problem in the 21st century, and who is not only a good interlocutor but also a Serbian patron in certain vital issues. All other great powers (with the exception of China, whose political and strategic potential has not yet been felt in these regions) are and will remain only orderlies vis-à-vis the Serbs. Only Russia, as it is, is an understanding interlocutor. Therefore, for the Serbs, a Russian defeat is an unfavourable and unacceptable solution, even if it is the price of EU survival/advancement.

However, the situation in Russia is also causing anxiety due to uncertainty - the imagined "settling" of the situation in Ukraine lasting one to two weeks has turned into a war of attrition, in which the attacking side in the conflict shows serious signs of being out of breath - there has been no progress on the front for two months. The high level of support of the population for the current political direction is maintained at the cost of avoiding mobilization, the introduction of martial law, and playing normality in the background.

Let's go back to the EU. Is it worth rushing into its arms if there are increasingly loud and frequent announcements/initiatives for the partial or complete abolition of the veto rights of its members? Should we potentially sacrifice the little remaining sovereignty/independence for the sake of less and less certain material well-being, which is, let's not be fooled, the primary motive for interest in the EU among the vast majority of those citizens who are inclined to join it. The current alleged uncertainty about the pace of further extending of the EU is not only caused by the war in Ukraine, but also by deliberations/maneuvering/backroom actions regarding the proposed abolition of the mandatory consent of its members on certain issues.

By all accounts, until the right of veto is abolished or reduced to a significant extent, there will be no talk of further extending of the EU with a dozen new small states subject to various influences. Thus,

the path to the EU essentially turns into a path to a "golden cage" - gold is gold, but a cage remains a cage.

Potential turbulent processes in the Islamic world also cause anxiety in the age of uncertainty. Will the instability in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries of the Middle East and North Africa trigger off a new wave of millions of refugees? And how will Europe react? By giving up Russian gas and oil, Europe/EU is throwing itself into a web of energy dependence on the Gulf monarchies, some of which, not very discreetly, like Qatar, openly support extremist organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood. In such a relationship, where after closing the door to Russia, Europe, when it comes to energy, is literally at the mercy of oil and gas producers from the Middle East, a more lenient approach to various Islamist branches in European countries may be a forced position of the leading European countries, as well as the EU itself. Within this package-arrangement, greater support for Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija and Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina could be taken for granted

Finally, perhaps the key question of all questions - will Europe/EU find the strength to resist the challenges of escalation and spillover of armed struggle to the entire European continent. Because a war and an armed struggle should be distinguished. Through the sending of military (material) aid, the departure of mercenary volunteers, the reception of Ukrainian soldiers for training, the sending of military observers, advisors and instructors, Europe/EU is already engaged in the war, as one of the warring parties. The only thing missing is the actual armed struggle outside the borders of Ukraine. For now, the Europeans prefer the position - we provide the material and the Ukrainians the people. According to the testimony of the Ukrainian Defence Minister, disclosed by the advisor to the Ukrainian President Arestovich, during the meeting at the German base called Ramstein with the European ministers, they all shook hands with him. And they said: "Please, beat up the bastards!" The Swedes added: "For Poltava!" The French: "For Borodino!" And so on... So, some in Europe see the current internal European war as an opportunity to settle debts from previous continental wars. However, what if at some point those same Swedes, French, Poles, Germans and others think of settling historical accounts with Russia themselves? And this possibility causes anxiety in an age of uncertainty. Let's hope it never happens.

In any case, there is plenty of research material in the social sciences. To me personally, two topics seem particularly attractive - how do demographically extremely regressive societies, such as Ukraine and Russia, behave and function in war, and how do modern societies, materially very rich and technologically highly developed, such as Western European ones, behave and function in the absence of energy sources?

Finally, some optimism and brighter tones. In the times to come, some countries will not have enough food, some will not have enough energy, and there will be those that will suffer from a double deficit - both food and energy. In this regard, the Republic of Srpska has all the prerequisites to be a "positive exception" and an island of "modest (self) sufficiency" in an age of uncertainty and deprivation. Therefore, in the coming period, in addition to the struggle for its status in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the key will be the effort to maintain and further develop energy and food sovereignty.