

*EUROPE'S PROSPECTS IN THE CONTEMPORARY
WORLD*

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1. The place and role of Europe in today's world

In the post Covid-19 world it is likely that there will be a trend toward some de-globalization. In the economic field this trend will probably be quite limited. There will also be a new type of tension between two poles: the United States and China, an ascending power. Although there has even been mention of the possibility of decoupling in some critical areas, for example the separation of Internet systems, this is fortunately quite exaggerated and highly unlikely.

Conflicts in various regions of the world are not abating. Terrorism continues to be a danger.

The post-Pandemic world economy will require more cooperation and coordination and a substantial decrease in inequalities within and across countries, also in order to enhance further global economic capacities at the era of transformation to the knowledge economy.

Protecting the climate vigorously has become an issue of utmost priority and urgency.

In today's world, some of whose main characteristics have been briefly indicated above, is there, will there be a need for Europe, for the EU?

The answer is "Certainly yes and even more!".

Democrats' and Biden's win in the November 2020 elections in the US is likely to provide greater scope to the EU in the world in several critical domains, notably in terms of contributing to strengthening democracy. Which also increases further the EU's responsibility in this domain within its own borders and in terms of the consistency and greater unity of its policies worldwide.

It is clear that growing tensions and conflicts in various parts of the world, hostilities, lack of cooperation, a growing lack of democracy will be harmful to the entire globe.

The EU is a unique example of voluntarily shared sovereignty, even if this sharing is still of rather limited scope and advocates to a considerable extent an open world, in accordance with its founding principles and philosophy embracing democracy. It emphasizes its commitment to peace, not only for its region but around the world.

To the extent it can advance in conformity with its principles and objectives the EU will be more and more needed as a potent third pole and a force of equilibrium, not only in political and security or economic terms, but also in terms of models of state and societal governance. Especially at a time when populism has weakened the United States prior to Biden's election as President and China is strengthening its authoritarian governance mechanisms, including with the help of advanced technologies and extending its influence over some regions in the world.

In the economic sphere, Europe is generally well integrated into the world economy. But there are very few global European technology companies despite the EU's great capacities in the field of science and technology and ICT as well as the progress it achieved in its transformation toward the knowledge economy. This critical lacuna limits Europe's power to influence the future of the global economy.

On the other hand, the EU could make a considerable contribution to strengthening and streamlining standards and regulations in a world-wide scale in various fields, from technologies to trade, social policy, climate, the environment and competition.

Moreover, the world economy is globalized, but the field of social policy is very much less so. And in this context, European standards and values matter even more.

It is no coincidence that Europe is at the forefront of the struggle to protect the climate and the environment, as reflected by the Green Pact. But for it to have more positive influence in the world, the EU must be stronger, and therefore also more coherent. It needs restructuring, rejuvenation, and a leap forward, particularly toward more Union. If it can achieve these it will be able to have much more effect on decisions at a global scale, particularly via its soft power. And it will be able to plead with increased vigor for a more balanced, more fertile and fairer globalization with a structure of governance encompassing enhanced cooperation, coordination and solidarity as well as efficiency. The need for developments in this direction has certainly become much clearer with the outbreak and ravages of the Pandemic.

2. Relaunching the European project with more emphasis on values

In the present era, the battle of values and opinions is of prime importance. Approaches and methods of a post-truth nature that obscure and distort the reality are very detrimental to the coherence, potency and unbiased perception of these. Such approaches and methods thereby obstruct progress considerably.

Europe needs to make greater use of and spread further its strengths, including its values and standards. But also its capacities in education, culture, health, sciences, technology, social policy and the legal system. Furthermore, its capabilities and vocation in these following three main areas constitute distinctive critical features:

(i) **Equality and solidarity.** These were neglected, in some instances indirectly, in an increasing way after around 1980 because of the adoption, to a considerable extent, of the “market efficiency” approach which privileged market solutions to an excessive degree to the detriment of needs and developments in the field of social policy and equity. Combined with some other factors at a certain stage this led to large increases in unemployment and inequality which were compounded by deficiencies and disparities in educational opportunities. It is clear that social policy objectives retain utmost significance. Also for economic progress.

(ii) **Fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.** In this framework, notably: the protection and promotion of human rights, the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, the prevention of the abuse of power, equality before the law, absence of any form of discrimination, respect for and freedom of opinions and beliefs for everyone, and similarly for the freedom of expression;

Also, and with a strong emphasis, non-discrimination toward women as well as defense of their right to equal participation, without direct or indirect obstacle, into all domains of life; And secularism.

(iii) **Sharing of sovereignty and participation.** Even though it remains quite partial for the moment, the voluntary sovereignty sharing model of the EU could become and serve as an example of an embryonic form of a possible governance structure at world level in the long-term future. The further development of EU’s governance structures would strengthen Europe and also the world. Particularly because they are also necessary for the harmonious and fruitful development of the knowledge economy at the global level and for strengthening the latter with adequate social policies.

To achieve its goals Europe needs reformers. And in this vein explaining to and discussing thoroughly with European citizens the EU objectives and policies will be crucial.

In general, citizen participation in governance at all possible levels, notably from the local level, is essential for the progress and harmony of the EU. Reforms and transformations

cannot be successful without a potent popular demand for them and the strong participation of citizens. Reducing inequalities is also necessary for ensuring greater participation.

3. Should the European project deepen the EU or widen it?

It is clear that the European project must be deepened. It is incomplete. There are only very few critical areas outside the single market where the sharing of sovereignty is sufficiently advanced. This does not mean that the existing structures of the EU are not significant and valuable. But progress clearly remains behind needs. And it is very likely that the EU and its member countries would have been stronger if the European project could have been deepened earlier. However, the delay can still be compensated.

The EU also needs enlargement. It is true that it is difficult to speak of enlargement at this time. But this difficulty is mainly due to conjunctural and temporary reasons.

The EU clearly needs enlargement for economic (including the scale and technology aspects), social (including demographics), political and defense reasons among others.

If an eligible country meets the conditions for membership, why should it be denied it? Enlargement should not be a great source of problems in such a case. In fact, there may well be and probably will be opposition to such new memberships, but the real source of the difficulties will not be the eligible country that meets the entry conditions. So, we will need to explain and embrace this reality. And foremost at the conceptual level.

Deepening and enlargement are not mutually exclusive.

In addition to the above arguments, there is also a need to broaden the domain of application of the EU's societal governance related standards, norms, principles and values in the broad context. Excluding eligible countries that meet the membership criteria would also mean opting for an EU which is limited to an entity based on its existing cultural components and excluding others. EU standards, norms, principles and values mentioned above are precious notably because they are also universal. And to a very large extent it is by acting with the perception of this universality that the EU can progress further and become more influential in the world.

Obviously there are at present difficulties in this area and we cannot neglect these. But we need to make the right choice in terms of principles. And also not to assess and restrict the future on the basis of difficulties which are essentially conjunctural and temporary in nature when viewed from a broader perspective.

Exclusion at the conceptual level would also harm the development of eligible countries as well as of third countries in their neighborhood. It would also diminish prospects for the development of EU's power and positive influence in these regions and in the world.

The United Kingdom has unfortunately chosen Brexit. Yes there was a reaction from a certain part of the British population against for example those who came from Eastern European countries and some other comparable reactions. But the basis of most of such and other economic etc arguments which tipped the balance against "Remain" was tenuous. It was evidently irrational in some cases or clearly fabricated in some others. In my opinion Brexit is one of the most saddening, imprudent and harmful decisions in recent contemporary history. Unfortunately it is harmful to both the British people and Europe as a whole and with further serious negative world wide consequences.

Here is a small but nevertheless significant example about the harm Brexit can and already does bring. After Brexit the UK has also opted not to take part as an associated third country in the new Erasmus+ programme 2021-27. In fact the UK enjoys one of the highest standards in education in the world as many have also experienced at first hand. The British education system also has a strong universal component, notably a European one. And thus the UK's exit from the Erasmus programme is clearly harmful, including for the future, to both the EU and the UK as it removes the EU-UK component of a mutually most beneficial educational programme.

It might be said that if a larger part of the UK citizens who were in favor of "Remain" had explained the prevailing realities more clearly and worked more arduously in favor of their choice, the decision of the UK electorate would have been a more informed one and may perhaps even have been different.

The Brexit case is also relevant for different types of future decision making situations in Europe.

Conclusion

My brief suggestions in guise of conclusion are as follows:

- To consolidate, streamline and improve further what works; in fact, despite its shortcomings in several areas the EU is very or more advanced in several main areas. Namely at the EU level: the single market; At present partly and in some cases in quite a limited way at the EU level: social policy, education, technological and scientific capabilities in a number of fields, climate and the environment, democracy, human rights, the legal system, women's rights, social mobility, approach to peace

- To restructure where necessary so as to be more performing in today's world, including in view of increased competition from China

- To express and implement a common desire for reformist transformation which increasingly transcends national borders as far as possible

- The nation states within the EU are at present the most powerful centers of power; one cannot advance toward more Union and a stronger Europe without their full and active par-

ticipation in this direction. But there cannot be real progress either if they preserve all their prerogatives

- Therefore: more sharing of sovereignty on a gradual and voluntary basis but also with a clear will and at a sustained pace, realising that failing to render the EU more coherent and potent via this path would lead to a great waste of Europe's resources

- To deepen and also enlarge in a realistic and principled way and without falling into a standstill while considering also the prospect of a temporarily circoncentric EU

- To restructure and strengthen the international role of the EU

- To develop further the EU's defense capacity for selected suitable purposes and in a realistic way

- To explain and make involve much more

- Including via the education system

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Note: The opinions expressed in this article reflect the author's personal views.