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Integrationism, interests and power in a troubled European Union(II) The Eastern Challenge

**An interview with Federico Bordonaro, Europe Editor, Senior Analyst with the Power and Interest News Report, by Stefan Bocioaca, editor of the Romanian website globalizarea.com
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Q: In your recent analysis "Bulgaria and Turkey Move to Secure Accession to the E.U." you wrote: "Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, and Turkey are all working to meet E.U. demands (the so-called *Acquis Communautaire*) in order to join the Community. They do so, however, at a time of crisis in European politics" How can you describe this crisis: a structural one or is maybe temporary, related to a "normal" period of adjustments?

A: I think the crisis is structural, and I'll tell you why. But at the same time, I want to first point out that such a crisis paves the way to a change in the character of the E.U., whereas I don't think it will cause the Union to disintegrate.

The crisis is structural because it does not depend upon some temporary individual policies, carried by eccentric governments. Indeed, there are demographic, economic, institutional and political aspects of the crisis. Briefly said, the E.U. enlargement has created an enormous political space, but it has at the same time caused a series of problems.

(a) Demography: as an excellent study of Prof. Pierre Verluise [*"Géopolitique de l'Europe"*, Paris, 2005] has demonstrated, the declining demographics of Europe won't be helped much by the accession of the 10 new countries (2004), nor by the accession of Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia. In fact, what is important is to grasp the fundamental dynamics of the demographic evolution. Such a dynamics remains one of decline. Turkey is obviously just another story, but it also opens "eternal" quarrels over the European identity, civilization, etc.;

(b) Economy: statistics tell us that the average GDP and productivity of the E.U. with 25 members won't be helped by the enlargement; also, I'd say that national, traditional visions of the economic and industrial policy are still alive and kicking -- although, of course, limited by communitarian rules -- which makes it extremely unlikely the rise of a consistently common economic policy in Europe;

(c) Institutionally, the functioning of the E.U. is even more cumbersome after the enlargement, because the decision-making (which is too long to be explained in this interview) is slightly more complicated than before, whereby it was already problematic;

(d) Politically, the E.U. tends to produce internal alignments of different groups of member-states every time a serious crisis erupts. Just look at the Iraqi War (and it was before the 10 new members officially entered the E.U.). Also, the key members in Western and Eastern Europe don't share the same general, global vision of Europe. Some are more Atlanticist than others, some are more statist than others, etc. It's

difficult to function as an effective unit in these conditions. Especially since France, U.K., and Germany remain three different social models.

So in my view, the present context can produce two likely scenarios. The first one, which is a bit depressing, is a long period when the attempts to produce a federal, supranational Europe will continue (along with further enlargements), while stumbling upon the harsh realities of national histories and economic interests. The second one, which could gain strength in the near future, is to re-think the whole European enterprise on the basis of inter-governmental policies predicated upon shared interests and focused on specific regional issues. This "variable geometry" Europe would accept the reality of national sovereignty while opening the way to enhanced cooperation wherever possible. For the moment, only "some" neo-gaullists in France appear ready to embrace such a view. But there are chances that such a pragmatic vision will gain supporters in the next 4-5 years.

Q: From an economic point of view, these new future members will contribute to a larger European market, but what kind of political impact is their admission likely to have?

A: I don't think the situation will change much. This planned enlargement will reinforce the current trends, and the positive political impact will be limited. Also, not all E.U. members will perceive the integration of Balkan and Black Sea's countries in the same way. Italy, for instance, will be happy of a more integrated political-economic area going from the Adriatic Sea to the Black Sea, because of geoeconomic reasons. So I think reactions will be asymmetrical, just as almost everything else in the enlarged Europe.

Q: I think that you had a good reason to mention the demographic factor first. Paul Kennedy wrote in his book "Preparing for the Twenty First Century" that global demographic trends can affect the social order and even influence Europe's foreign policy. This internal vulnerability associated with the external pressure of the migrational trends is quite visible today. The question is how the politicians, the state and the society could act together to address this crucial issue. So far the concerns are mainly directed towards the near economic future.

Now regarding your answer to my second comment, I agree, the current polarisations and perceptions will be reinforced by future enlargements. Meanwhile it seems that the Atlanticist view will gain more power if we consider that Romania and Bulgaria have both rather Atlanticist and more "pragmatic" attitudes. Do you think that their alignment could empower the Atlanticist camp while weakening other visions ?

A: It is very likely. This is a reinforcement of an already visible trend, as Poland and the Baltic States, but also Czech Republic have made their geopolitical orientation clear even before joining the E.U.: N.A.T.O. and a strong partnership with the U.S. are considered to be the top priorities.

Let me stress that history here plays the decisive role. These former communist countries are trying to secure their independence, as they fear to be reabsorbed in some way into a Moscow-dominated sphere of influence (although certainly not in the same form as in the past).

The big challenge for Western Europe is to progressively build useful, intensive partnerships with Eastern European countries while at the same time not upsetting

Russia. France and Germany tend to view Russia as the main Eurasian strategic/energetic partner for the future (see the pipeline projects, or some form of military/aerospatial cooperation). But they need a balanced approach. It will take time. However, the U.S. and the U.K. will have an easier task than France and Germany, because the European enlargement has actually empowered the "Atlanticist party" in Europe.

Q: "Moscow cannot compete with the U.S. as a security provider and regional hegemon." (The quote is taken from the PINR "Economic Brief: The Blue Stream Gas Pipeline") Does it mean that Russia is not likely to be a military threat in the region?

A: It means, first and foremost, that Moscow cannot play the role of the "benign hegemon" which provides security and democracy. Simply because of geopolitical reasons! Moscow is the dominant Eurasian-Heartlandic power, whereas the U.S. is the leader of a Maritime geostrategic realm and can therefore be an "offshore balancer" in various regions of the world.

That said, Moscow could be a military threat in the region. Especially if the U.S. and E.U. insist to integrate Ukraine and Trans-Caucasus in their security architecture. I think it's a mistake not to understand that extending N.A.T.O. to Ukraine is to penetrate Russia's historic and geopolitical core. Moscow won't be more friendly afterwards. It will probably assume aggressive stances, particularly on the Crimea issue. It is sufficient to read Sergei Ivanov's article in the Wall Street Journal (11 January) to understand that Moscow is fed up with being rolled back indefinitely.

Q: Did unipolarity prove to be the right answer to the security concerns in Europe, and mostly in Eastern Europe? What to think about the Russian general Baluyevsky's warning : "Russia has the right to defend its interests in the post-Soviet space and we will do it."

A: Baluyevsky's words have been received with shock in the West, but as I told above, I think they're very natural because of geopolitical realities. Unipolarity has appeared as the right answer in Eastern Europe in the last 15 years. The real question is: is it adequate to face the challenges of the next 10-20 years?

Q: A Belgian diplomat once made a joke: "Europe is an economic giant, a political dwarf and a military worm". Yet for the new NATO members, this organization is playing a triple role: economical, political and military! William Pfaff wrote in a recent article(IHT, March 13, 2006): "Europe is where the Poles live. Sooner or later, the Americans will go back across the ocean. " This is not a scary perspective, mostly for the UE Eastern members?

A: Well, for the moment, the U.S. are interested in redeploying their troops in order to face what they perceive as the new fundamental threats to their security interests. I'd stress how Washington has sought with determination to use bases in Romania and Bulgaria, and that it gives increasing importance to Georgia and Azerbaijan..

In other words, the U.S. is progressively leaving Western Europe but it knows that the Eastern European "rimland" is decisive in order to maintain influence in Eurasia. Therefore, I don't think the U.S. will "go back across the Ocean" any time soon, but I think that it will keep on restructuring its presence in Eurasia.

Q: In my opinion the debates about globalization downplayed too much the reality of the national interest of states, probably considering that this is not an actual issue, but in fact most of the frictions, challenges and threats today arise from this area. It seems that we are far from a "global harmony" or even a "regional harmony" either in Europe or in Asia. Can we say that the winding road to a successful regional integration can not have a bright future mostly because it's impossible to match the interests of each state with a broad, regional imperative? Is the new fear that the sum of too many parts undermines not just the result but its constituents as well?

A: Your interpretation sounds very reasonable. It is sufficient to analyse the different perceptions of France, the U.K. and Germany regarding various international issues (both strategic and economic), to understand that a mega-federation of E.U. states would be very difficult to govern in an efficient way.

Q: Talking about a multipolar world: is Europe a real pole today, or "une victime désignée à l'avance"? How can US become "primus inter pares in a multipolar world" in which Europe is playing a minor role? I think that if UE could become a genuine "pole", economical, political and military, then eventually a new and more balanced order will have the chance to exist. The real danger is a world with both US and Europe weakened and with a lack of strategy ahead.

A: Your view sounds similar to that of Mr Chirac -- and also to that of Mitterrand before him. The real issue is that France has little chance to convince Germany, the UK, Italy but also Poland and Spain, that the E.U. can become a "real power pole" without upsetting Washington and provoking an Euro-Atlantic crisis.

That is certainly part of the problem. We should ask ourselves and others: who shares France's geopolitical views today in Europe? The thing is, Russia may be the only power that could work consistently with France, but that means the main partner would be outside the E.U. And also, France does not want to join Moscow at the expense of its friendship with Washington! So Paris should succeed in a diplomatic masterpiece, which is: rebalancing the Euro-Atlantic partnership while working for a balanced multipolarity together with Russia (and China), and maintaining leverage and leadership in the E.U.

Q: How can the "variable geometry" approach accommodate the existence of regional leaders in the Central and East Europe?

A: The "variable geometry" approach can only work if the main powers (France, UK, Germany, and then Italy, Spain, Poland) accept the principle that E.U. states can launch "enhanced cooperation" on specific issues such as energy, defense/security, environment, labour market.

Regional leaders would then try to form coalitions and start enhanced cooperation by engaging other E.U. partners. That can work only if there is a general agreement on a sort of "Chart of E.U. nations", which replaces the "super-state-oriented" Constitutional Treaty, that can set aside a broader framework with looser rules. As far as I know, the British conservatives and the French sovereignists (de Villiers and some others) might agree on that. Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, and Poland would likely agree on such a view, but as you know, the more federalist forces inside the E.U. are still strong and would oppose it -- probably, the latter would be backed by the financial sectors and the

Central Bank. As a result, the political battle for the "soul and heart" of Europe will be long!

Q: Can we talk about or perceive a competition for regional leadership ? I'm thinking about countries like Poland, Romania, Greece, Turkey, Romania, Ukraine, Serbia or Russia whose leaders expressed such ambitions.

A: Yes, we can definitely talk about such a competition; this is inevitable because of deeply rooted historical conditions and geopolitical realities. The sooner we recognize this fact, the better we can shape a realistic European political framework.

Q: According to Harold Mackinder: "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland" Is this an outdated model in a space where the countries rather aim for integration, prosperity and more security?

A: In my opinion, when one reads the U.S. strategic literature, one notices how Mackinder's and Spykman's general view is still very influential, although today's geopolitics certainly includes the modifications of spatial relations due to technical progress and globalization.

So, in the end, Eastern Europe is without a doubt an enormous stake, and one in which the U.S. and Russia are competing for influence both in geostrategic and geoeconomic terms. As the U.S. geopolitician Saul B. Cohen says, Eastern Europe may become a "gateway" between the U.S.-dominated Maritime realm, and the Russia-led "Eurasian landmass", in case Washington and Moscow design a grand bargain. Otherwise, should the two main power compete more sharply, Eastern Europe risks to become a huge "compression zone" and some of its regions, such as Transdniester or even Ukraine, a "shatterbelt" marked by dangerous conflicts.

The E.U. is, for the moment, split between a more Atlanticist vision and a pro-Eurasian orientation. For E.U. states, the real challenge is to gain more political independence without causing friction with the U.S. A difficult task, which requires intelligent, determined and realistic political leadership.