



## ARTICLE

# Europe's protective power

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**Abstract** The EU has weathered the financial crisis but continues to face a host of challenges: its role in international politics, the scope of security and defence cooperation, the question of how to redefine the concept of 'sovereignty', the societal impact of technological disruption and migration, and the general anxiety among the EU's population in relation to globalisation. In this context it is important for the EU to remain confident in itself and its sense of identity.

**Keywords** European integration | European identity | Europeanism | Culture

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## Introduction

Has Europe finally overcome its crises or are we still in the midst of them? Have we made it through the financial crisis reasonably well only to overlook the tsunami of problems that is rapidly approaching?

Everyone can understand the sigh of relief heard in Brussels and the capitals of Europe after the elections in the Netherlands, France, Germany and Austria. Everyone, of course, is hoping to see a quick and reasonable outcome of the Brexit negotiations and a compromise in the Spanish–Catalonian constitutional dispute. We all wish Presidents Juncker and Tusk every success in the coming rounds of talks with the Visegrad countries. A great deal will depend on the revived French–German community of action and the personal chemistry between Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel if the EU's clout in international competition is to be strengthened within the framework of the existing Treaties. This includes a deepened internal market; more precise and, above all, supervised rules of the Stability and Growth Pact; the development of a secure Banking Union and Capital Markets Union; the protection of external borders; and a common foreign, security and defence policy.

Looking to the future, what can we expect?

## Europe's role in the world

Let me start with Europeans and their place in tomorrow's global village. Until 1800 the world population was quite stable at just under one billion people, whose life expectancy was around 26 years. One third of the world's population lived in Europe and generated approximately half of the global GNP. A hundred years later, there were two billion people: one fifth of them lived in Europe, where they had a life expectancy of 40 years and produced 40% of the global GNP. By 2000 population figures had surged to six billion, with Europe accounting for no more than 10% of the world population but still generating 25% of the world's GNP. Our life expectancy has doubled. By 2030 there will be 8.5 billion people living on this planet, and the figure may well rise to 10 billion by 2050. The number of people over the age of 60 will increase from 800 million to 2 billion. All this will not necessarily be disadvantageous, but it means that we need to concentrate intensively on the development of our strengths and talents. Brain power will be the true raw material of the future. Europe will have to fight for its place in the global village—both as a business location and as a model for a way of life. Those who prefer to ride on the nostalgia train run the risk of ending up in the local history museum.

## The changing security landscape

Security cannot be taken for granted: our world is no planet of peace. At present, 400 armed conflicts are on record in the global village. The UN is supporting 60 million officially registered refugees through the World Food Program and other specialised agencies. In reality, however, two to three times as many people have lost everything and are now struggling to stay alive. At the same time, a gigantic arms spiral has been set in motion. Purchases of weapons worldwide have increased by 50% in recent years. The US is spending the incredible amount of \$600 billion a year on armaments. The Chinese have increased their military expenditure from \$93 billion to \$235 billion and want to build a ‘world-class army’, according to Xi Jin Ping (*The Economic Times* 2017). Over the past 10 years, Russia has doubled its military budget, which now stands at \$70 billion. In contrast, military spending in the EU is stagnating, even though Europe is anything but a military giant. In the past a common defence and security policy seemed like a far-fetched idea. This seems to be changing. However, there is another sphere in which Europe has excelled: the art of diplomacy, of mediation, and of economic and cultural cooperation. It must have been the traumatic experience of centuries of wars and conflicts in Europe that led us to develop new, more cooperative and sustainable viewpoints and strategies. These are indispensable for the future: hand-in-hand cooperation instead of head-to-head confrontation. Nevertheless, if our ‘soft power’ were supported by professional military capacities, it would be even more effective. The concept of rapidly deployable ‘battle groups’ could be transferred to humanitarian relief operations abroad and civil protection at home.

## Sovereignty in a globalised world

What does the notion of sovereignty stand for in the twenty-first century? In his groundbreaking work *The Globalization Paradox*, US economist Dani Rodrik argues that globalisation, democracy and national sovereignty are fundamentally incompatible. It would be possible either to contain globalisation in order to strengthen democratic legitimisation, or to restrict democratic decisions in the interest of higher competitiveness. Another possibility would be to pursue global targets at the expense of national sovereignty. Most of the time, however, politicians shy away from clear decisions. They want voters to participate in the decision-making process, but not to vote for populist parties. Free trade is all very well, but when a crisis occurs, it should still be possible to protect domestic businesses, prevent closures and exercise national control—in other words, protectionism rather than free trade. Nowadays numerous decisions are being outsourced to technocratic institutions: financial markets, rating agencies, the Troika, the European Central Bank, the European Economic and Monetary Union and the Court of Justice of the European Union. Many of these decisions have a strong impact on people’s daily lives and are not subject to democratic control in the traditional sense. This is why the ‘take back control’ slogan went down so well when the British voters had a choice to remain or to leave. To a growing extent, similar demands are being voiced by Scots, Catalans and the advocates of autonomy for Veneto and Lombardy. If we want our European way of life

to be future-proof, we need to find the right balance between international competitiveness, citizen participation, national/regional identity and self-determination. The nation state is still very much alive and far from obsolete, but it will have to provide evidence of its power of cohesion. Regional identities alone are not enough. In an age of globalised networking, self-sufficiency is not an option. Autarchy is a dead end. Rather, the future model of success is based on optimum networking in an effort to exercise as much influence as possible at all levels. Active participation and shared responsibility will define the future of sovereignty: chances of success are greater for those who are best able to contribute their points of view and interests to the general pool of ideas than for those who choose to be self-sufficient. More effective implementation of the principle of subsidiarity and of well-considered decentralisation should serve as important guidelines.

## Demographic change

Where do we go from here? The recent electoral campaigns hardly addressed a number of the major challenges confronting Europe. These challenges include our ‘old’ continent’s sluggish demographic growth, as compared to the dynamic growth seen in neighbouring Africa, whose population will double in the course of this century. This is likely to cause migration pressure that will not ease for decades and cannot be kept under control by inadequate rules and institutions. Artificial intelligence and biotechnology are changing our world as much as, if not more than, the advent of electricity, the automobile and television. According to Noah Harari, the crucial question today is ‘Who owns the data?’, a question which he considers just as important as ‘Who owns the land?’ in an agrarian society and ‘Who owns the machines and factories?’ in the industrial age. The most important economic drivers of the future will no longer be steel, cars, textiles or chemistry, but intellectual capacity, ideas and talent. This is what Europe must prepare for.

## The rise of Western anxiety

In ageing and prosperous societies, anxieties come to the fore. All the challenges described above are materialising at breakneck speed. By global standards Europe is the continent of the elderly and the affluent. It is only logical that citizens are plagued by uncertainty and a fear of loss. In such situations of upheaval, people often tend to withdraw to a seemingly safe haven: pull up the drawbridge to keep your family, your region, your religion, your nation and your ideology safe. Feeling overburdened, some citizens even become aggressive, discontented, chauvinistic and backward-looking. And there will always be demagogues around to exploit their mood. They evoke the good old days (‘Make America great again’), which were not really so good at all. Retrotopias, the denial of scientific findings, fake news, expert bashing and the cultivation of negative images of outsiders are all part of the fearmonger’s tool kit. Therefore, for committed Europeans the only choice is to engage in this debate and to do so with passion. Very often, citizens who tend to side with populist parties are not enemies of democracy or

of European unification, but merely disappointed democrats and Europeans. Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of today's EU, once referred to the two major political forces: the dynamics of fear and the dynamics of hope (Cuperus 2006, 143). Ultimately, however, he placed his trust in the power of optimism. He found a legitimate follower in David Precht, who said that 'an optimist who fails has led a far more meaningful life than a pessimist who is proven right' (Precht 2017, author's translation).

## Conclusion

It is worth our while to invest a little more in strengthening this optimism and in our European identity. It is no contradiction to have an identity that is Viennese, Austrian and European at the same time, or to be proud of one's regional origin in Germany, France, Poland or Italy without forgetting the nation and the European perspective. In the coming months the European People's Party will be getting ready for the important elections to the European Parliament. Why not organise a competition for an up-to-date text for the European anthem, which is musically a true 'Ode to Joy'? Or let us remember the luminaries of culture in all member states. Mozart, with his love of harmony and synergy, would certainly have opted for Europe. Voltaire reminds Europe of tolerance. Michelangelo stands for beauty, Joyce for the notion of homeland, Preschern for freedom, Petöfi for independence, Socrates for the freedom of thought, Havel for truth, Nobel for peace. There is something for each nation to identify with here, and all of it could converge into a fascinating kaleidoscope of our unique European model, our 'European way of life'. This, by the way, is what we should propose as a campaign slogan for the 2019 elections to the European Parliament.

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