

Preface

The year 2017 marked 60 years since the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which was designed to realize the vision of a united European community. The treaty and the European Common Market represented the continuation of a complex and perhaps unique process in which the founding nations, and those that were subsequently admitted, agreed to give up elements of their sovereignty in favor of supranational European institutions. Over the years the member states have dealt with the unending tension between the desire to preserve their national-sovereign individuality and the recognition that notwithstanding the problems and disagreements, the idea of a united Europe has provided more than seven decades of economic prosperity and security.

More than anything else, the vote in Britain to exit the EU symbolized the “centrifugal force” that opposes the growing authority of the EU institutions imposed on the national governments in economic, social, and legal matters. While the British tendencies in favor of secession from the EU were evident for a long time and were manifested in special membership arrangements, in other member states the hesitations and doubts developed at later stages. The expected tension between the nation-state and a supranational system was exacerbated by the accelerated acceptance process of the East European nations following the collapse of the Soviet bloc. The process of their integration imposed a heavy financial cost and exposed the workers in most of the “veteran” member states to competition from a cheap labor force. In parallel to the fall of the internal walls in Europe, the external boundaries were also breached. Millions of Africans seeking water, jobs, education, and healthcare immigrated to Europe, as did many Turks, by exploiting the relative ease of illegal entry into Europe. They were followed by immigrants escaping from central Asia, in particular from Afghanistan, and by a third

wave following the civil wars that erupted in the Middle East over the past decade.

These developments reawakened xenophobic feelings, racism, and anti-Semitism, which constitute the ideological foundations of the extreme parties that have flourished in many of the EU countries. These parties also adopted a nationalist anti-European line that opposed not only continued integration but even called for exiting the EU. At the same time, terror cells appeared within the immigrant populations, which largely did not assimilate in their new countries and often had no desire to do so. These terror cells were ideologically nourished by extreme Islamic movements in the Middle East and North Africa. The influence of these movements was also manifested in the Islamic State's recruitment of members of the younger generation – most of whom were born in Europe to immigrant parents. These young recruits reflect the depth of the problem confronting the EU. The EU finds itself facing fundamental questions, such as whether it can and should force its norms on minority populations such as Muslims and Jews that are in contradiction to their beliefs, concerning, for example, issues of circumcision, ritual slaughter, and dress code. Some who have been recruited to terrorism, whether in Europe or on the battlefields of the Islamic State, have received their inspiration at mosques or through the social networks that have exploited European liberalism and the Continent's freedom of expression and religious worship in order to spread hatred and incitement. This has forced Europe to consider the validity of its fundamental principles in a reality in which large groups are undermining these principles and endangering the very existence of a viable EU.

Alongside its internal problems, the EU faces serious difficulties trying to present in the international arena the image of a cohesive body with unified positions. The EU, along with NATO, was created as part of a bipolar global configuration that followed the Second World War. The disintegration of the Soviet bloc was used by these two organizations in order to absorb the Baltic states and a large portion of the East European states. Russia, which had been defeated without a shot being fired, had no choice but to accept the strategic turn of events, but without fully reconciling itself to the situation. Currently Russia is challenging the US and Europe by means of its willingness to use force in order to halt the process in regions that are viewed by Russia as essential from a strategic perspective and in which Russia has assets that it

can exploit for defense and the realization of strategic goals. Ukraine is a prime example, but not the only one, of Russia's old-new aspirations.

Over the last decade, China has risen in the EU's list of priorities. In addition to China being an immense market for Europe, Europe constitutes a highly important economic target for China, and the average daily amount of mutual trade between these two giants totals about one billion dollars. China is a problematic trade partner for Europe with respect to Chinese imports, as well as its aggressiveness in marketing, the transport of goods, and China's investments in the infrastructures of other countries. The Belt and Road Initiative, on land and sea, was created in order to shorten the time it takes to travel from China to Europe. Similarly, the plan to exploit the Northwest Passage is becoming a reality due to climate change. These two maritime routes and the modern version of the Silk Road will make Europe much more accessible to China, and this reality involves both opportunities and risks.

Against this background, it appears that the distancing of the US from its European allies is more problematic than ever. Even before the arrival of Donald Trump in the White House, the relations of the US with its European partners in NATO and with the EU were problematic. The laborious process of decision making in Europe, particularly with respect to foreign policy and defense, was always a source of derision in Washington. In contrast to US activism and willingness to use force, particularly when under a Republican president, post-World War II Europe recoiled from the use of force, reflected in what was allocated for defense budgets – with the gap used by President Trump to criticize the Europeans in NATO. The two sides are now reversing their roles on the Iran nuclear deal. Only the “soft” approach of US President Obama to Iran's nuclear program enabled agreement between the P5+1, especially the three European states, which demanded tougher conditions, and Iran. It is now the US President calling for reopening the negotiations; this has met with European resistance, thus exacerbating their relations. The European rush to Iran's door after the achievement of the JCPOA and particularly in view of the US desire to strengthen sanctions against Iran widens the distance between Washington and Brussels. The opposition of President Trump to international economic agreements and in particular those that in his opinion perpetuate the US trade deficit guarantee that there will not be a free trade zone between the EU and the US during his term.

The relations between Turkey on the one hand and the EU and NATO on the other are increasingly strained as a result of Erdogan's auto-theocratic domestic policies. Even though the negotiations over Turkey's request to join the EU have officially begun, it is clear they are unlikely to progress. Even before the rise of the nationalistic parties in Europe, there was doubt as to whether Turkey's membership would be approved in every country – whether in the parliament or by plebiscite – which is required in the case of acceptance of a new member. The circumstances of Europe in 2018 would seem to indicate that the entry of Turkey into the EU is simply unrealistic.

Finally, the frosty relations between Israel and the EU have not yet thawed and the two sides continue to have reservations about one another. The EU continues to criticize Israeli policy in all aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in particular the continued construction of settlements. Israel accuses the EU of an unbalanced policy that ignores Israel's considerations and is clearly biased toward the Palestinian side. The desire of the Palestinians to see the EU become the "honest broker" between them and Israel will constitute another source of tension between the EU – if it accepts the Palestinian invitation – and Israel, which will apparently reject any attempt to marginalize American mediation. These issues, as well as the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the legislative initiatives regarding Judea and Samaria are liable to worsen relations between Brussels and Jerusalem in 2018.

Despite all of the problems and challenges that Europe has faced in recent years, there is room for hope that the collective memory of the era of the world wars and the experience that has accumulated in the rehabilitation and unification of Europe will overcome the tendencies toward separation, secession, and racism, and that this unique enterprise will continue to exist and develop. Israel also has an interest in this happening. Europe does not supply Israel with weapons but it is nonetheless a critical economic and cultural ally.

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