

Etsior Monthly Opinion 15 November 2009 - Germany and Europe

I will this month move away from the economy sphere and take the celebration of the fall of the Berlin wall as a starting point for a geopolitical reflexion on Germany and Europe.

The recent past as well as history has shown how the humiliation of a great people after WW I, followed by a growing fear about its future, doubts about its identity associated with conservatism, authoritarianism, heaviness of religion, loss of power of a certain leading class and a difficulty for it to face the evolution of the world has led to the disaster of WW II. These behaviors have been perfectly well illustrated in the great movie of Michael Haneke "White Ribbon" that got the Palme d'Or at the Festival of Cannes last May.

Each time in the history that Germany got to the "dream and illusion" that it could dominate Europe, it had terrible consequences for peace in Europe. Securing the reunified Germany in the European Union was not obvious when the Berlin wall fell and nobody was sure then USSR would allow the reunified Germany to replace the Federal Republic in the European and Atlantic alliances, as a lot of good spirits were pleading for a neutral central European state.

One great book about this period was written by late French President François Mitterrand. In his book "De l'Allemagne, de la France", he gave a relation of the negotiations and the discussions which were held at this time. The reunification of Germany was linked to the following acceptances: intangibility of the eastern border of Germany with Poland (the Oder Neisse line); approval of the reunification by the four tutelary powers (USA, USSR, UK and France); renunciation of Germany to nuclear biological and chemical weapons, which implied the extension of the French nuclear umbrella in case of any aggression against the German territory; Germany being a full member of NATO; confirmation of the German full commitment toward the European construction, i.e. the European Union.

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All these points were of course extremely important and were the fundamentals for ongoing peace in Europe which is the greatest, but often forgotten, achievement of the European Union. In particular the reaffirmed full and active membership of Germany in NATO and as a founding member of the European Union was paramount. It put away the specter of a German Europe and emphasized the role of a European Germany, a leading member of the European Union. It is very interesting to see that whatever the suspicion, real or supposed, between any of the German chancellors and the French presidents, they always end up hand in hand as they naturally get to the conclusion there is no other choice than a strong German French alliance to assure the success and future of Europe.

And now what? All lies in the emergence of Europe as a major political world power. Europe is one of the biggest world markets with a population of over 400 million people, with very high standards and quality of life. It has achieved a custom union, a monetary union with the introduction of the euro, a free transit zone with the implementation of the Schengen agreement. Social benefits, especially health insurance benefits, protection against unemployment, have brought cohesion within the population. But Europe is still a political dwarf. It also runs the risks of losing its social advantage, achievement of the Rhine capitalism, in other words the Sozialmarktwirtschaft (Social market economy) and seeing, as in most parts of the world, the emergence of very rich and very poor's with a disintegration of its middle class. There is the hope that thanks to the implementation of the Lisbon treaty, Europe will be seen differently. Europe will have a real political power allowing it to bring its values, such as democracy and tolerance, its views and its influence and contribute to the future of the world and show the world the example of social coherence.

All these achievements, as all these hopes, are in part a consequence of the fall of the Berlin wall, though that may be strange to the younger generations.

Finally, I would like to quote a few lines of the book of François Mitterrand: *"I am dreaming to the predestination of Germany and France, designated by geography and their old rivalry, to give the signal. May chance make they have no other choice. If they have kept in themselves the best of what I do not hesitate to call their instinct of grandeur, they will understand it is all about a project worth of themselves... Germany and France will have to be convinced themselves. France always tempted by a turning on itself and the epic illusion of glory within loneliness, Germany always hesitating between its vocations, nation secured in a united Europe or heir, without expressing it, of imperial ambitions"*.

This is now up to our political elites, but also to the peoples, to show it is time to turn this anticipation, not to say utopia, into a new state, where all begins to be possible in Europe again.

We care for you!

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