

Europe: Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, and Something Blue

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Old Europe was once a grouping of feudal societies that occasionally interacted with each other. As transport and communication developed many of these feudal societies amalgamated to form larger societies known as nations where strings of alliances to preserve their interests developed.

If we fast forward to the end of the 19th Century Europe began to become dominated by two main groupings, the Triple Alliance between Germany, Austria, and Italy, and the Entente Cordiale between England and France. This was supplemented with the Franco-Russian Alliance, and the Anglo-Russian Entente.

These alliances formed two military camps on European soil and hastened the process to all out war when the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated in Sarajevo on 28th June 1914. Again in 1938, aggression across Europe led into bloodshed, pain and suffering destroying a major part of Europe. And after the Second World War Europe was partitioned with an iron curtain that once again divided the continent.

The narratives within Europe were once full of delusions of racial and religious superiority, imposed dominance, and cultural diversity. Some pockets of Europe today still hold these kinds of beliefs, where groups are still expressing aspirations for independence.

In Europe, there was a desperate need to find a way to co-exist, otherwise future conflicts would have devastating consequences similar to what has been witnessed a number of times through European history. The union had to unite a divided Europe of different histories and then stretch it's arms out to most of Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union with an almost unbelievable transformation which other regions of the world like the ASEAN Economic Community will find very hard to emulate.

We can see that the spirit of these old alliances are preserved not for war that dragged Europe into destruction, but this time to bail out a member Greece in the quest to save the union, although the decisions to do this put extreme pressure upon the individual members of the Union.

Today many fundamental questions are arising as new challenges. Youth unemployment, freedom of domicile within the union, the influx of migrants, the Euro-crisis, soaring health costs, rising petroleum prices, food shortages, and terrorism are all concerning Europeans deeply. The answers don't appear to be there and this is leading to great uncertainty.

The European phenomena is still incomplete. We had the political revolution symbolized by the blue European Union flag flying above European land and institutions under flickering with the winds that once blew through a divided Europe. The second revolution is an economic one, symbolized by the common regulation and the Euro currency. This is currently presenting great challenges as we are still finding that common regulation is not as easy as anticipated due to the cultural diversity and situational issues that persist within the union member states. The Euro and uniform financial regulation had unforeseen consequences. The perceived strength of the union, a common currency also had a paradoxical weakness in that it severely limited the utilization of monetary policy, as the EU has now found. Relying almost solely on budgetary mechanisms for fiscal control along Keynesian philosophies is not enough for member states.

Undoubtedly the European Union Economic approach needs another mechanism. The Euro currency is not the "Higgs Boson" particle that everybody anticipated, and another mechanism to financially drive Europe is needed. But the answer may come in a similar manner to scientists at CERN who discovered that quantum mechanics is extremely complex to truly understand, and the deep fundamentals are within the individual parts, rather than the whole.

There is another revolution that is needed to create the great EU as originally dreamed about. And this revolution is the hardest of all to achieve. It's a mistake to believe that this revolution will come from the committee rooms of the European Parliament. No revolution ever comes from a legislature.

This revolution is a spiritual one about vision for a new Europe and it must come from the streets of Munich, the streets of Paris, villages in Romania, and towers in Barcelona, and so on. The vanguard of this revolution will be the same people who were involved in the Arab Spring, the uprisings in Burma and Iran, and the Occupy movement in the United States, the youth of Europe.

The European Union must find the right balance between debate and consensus on an overall vision. That vision must permeate into all aspects of society. Without this vision Europe cannot progress and may actually decline. The people of Europe need a new identity that carries both meaning and a sense of excitement about the future.

And what must be borrowed by the European Union, once discarded in an attempt to create a pan-Euro culture is the *"hotch potch"* of cultural diversity that exists within the member states. Uniformity does not bring strength, diversity brings strength which has been unrecognized. Diversity is what makes Europe and the Commission has over the years tried to create a Europe of the lowest common denominator (LCD). Europe has actually been stripped of its very strength. The answer is not in the pan-Euro approach but engaging the diversity within the

Union, something many, if not the majority feel in their hearts. A Euro-culture should take in both national and pan-Euro traits and slowly evolve into a single Euro-identity.

Just like the Euro-debt crisis, the Euro-cultural crisis is the result of legislators believing that regulation is not the solution to everything. New approaches outside legislative frameworks are required here.

There is great risk that the metaphor of blue may become a sea that lacks the ability to have foresight and vision. The EU Council is fast becoming a transactional rather than transformational identity as it started out to be. The bureaucrats have replaced the dreamers and philosophers setting into motion processes that inhibit rather than rather than encourages growth in diversity and richness.

Blue is also symbolic of authority and the EU must be aware of the need to develop an environment where the Commission is not seen as top down regulator but truly concerned with what it's citizenry thinks and feels about issues. The citizens of the EU must be encouraged to develop a sense of ownership in the whole process once again.