

2016 - ANNO HORRIBILIS?

BY

MARC GUIOT

2016 was in many respects and in the eyes of many analysts an *annus horribilis*, one of the worst postwar years by Europeans standards. Needless to remind you of all the dramas it brought about. They are present in all memories: terrorist attacks all over the Western world, Brexit, Trump's success, the missed Turkish coup and the dramatic progress of populism, nationalism across Europe to name a few, terror has struck all over including in Berlin quite recently: Europe is facing a survival crisis.

“BREXIT AND TRUMP MAY BE THE FINAL TWO NAILS IN THE UNION'S COFFIN” (Andrew Dorman in The Independent)

Brexit was won on the basis of profoundly misleading promises, none of which the leave campaign had the authority to make. With the ensuing existential and constitutional crisis and the associated threat to the UK's stability, unity and prosperity, the case for a judicial review is unarguable.

BREXIT VERSUS NATO

In the words of Nato's secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg
2016 must surely rank as *Nato's annus horribilis*. With Russia becoming increasingly active on Nato's eastern borders, supporting the rebels in the Ukraine and now siding with Assad in Syria, the Nato members have been forced to refocus the alliance back towards the opponent it was originally created to tackle.

JOHN KERRY: “TURKEY COUP COULD THREATEN COUNTRY'S NATO MEMBERSHIP”

Turkey has a unique position within Nato: a border with Syria, control of the entrance to the Black Sea, access to the Caucasus including Georgia – and, on top of all of this, it's NATO's only muslim nation. As such, Turkey remains critical for Nato's future engagement with neighbors.

THE SURPRISE ELECTION OF DONALD TRUMP AS US PRESIDENT

Trump's questioning of the value of Nato to the US, and particularly the issue of burden-sharing, together with his apparent links to Russia and support for Russian involvement in Syria, have set a number of hares running.

For Europe, and particularly for those states that share a border with Russia and have a significant Russian minority within them, any questioning of the US guarantee to defend Europe via Article V of the Washington Treaty is of major concern, particularly if the UK's nuclear guarantee is lost.

Trump is talking of improved relations with Russia and has indicated that tackling Isis in Iraq and Syria is a greater priority. This suggests that Trump may be prepared to strike a deal whereby the US and Russia agree spheres of influence in a 21st century version of the Yalta agreement. (Andrew Dorman professor of International Security at King's College London)



DONALD TRUMP : PERSON OF THE YEAR (TIME)

Tastemakers and intellectuals have dismissed him as a vulgar and carnival barker, a showman with big flash and little substance. But what those critics never understood was that their disdain gave him strength. He will soon command history's most lethal military, along with economic levers that can change the lives of billions. And the people he has to thank are those he calls "the forgotten," millions of American voters.

"I'm representing them, and they love me and I love them,"

Instead of painting a bright vision for a unified future, Trump magnified the divisions of the present, inspiring new levels of anger and fear within his country.

He proved that tribal instincts never die, that in times of economic strife and breakneck social change, a charismatic leader could still find the enemy within and rally the masses to his side.

"He convinced a plurality of the voters in the states that mattered that he was the best person to bring change. *"Great again"* is his rallying cry.

Many who felt powerless have a new champion, where much frustration has given way to excitement and where politics has become the greatest show on earth.

According to professor De Grauwe, (in De Morgen) Trump is doomed to follow the same kind of political route as Adolph Hitler. He gallantly compares Trumps election campaign with Hitler's: before his access to total power.

Firstly De Grauwe clearly stresses Trump's despise for all political elites. Secondly, he pinpoints the dark internal and external powers that threaten the dominant position of the United States in the world. Trump's America refuses to play second fiddle. Thirdly, there is now a feeling that America can only be saved by a strong character who has no connection with the corrupt establishment. Only Trump, so they feel, can spare the States from a steady and swift decline.

With Donald John Trump, whatever happens next, it will never be like it was before. Likewise with Hitler 1933.

POPULISM MAY BE DESTROYING DEMOCRACY AS WELL AS THE EU

According to professor Mark Lecherous (sociologist at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel) populist leaders play an essential role in European *democracies* such as Slovakia , Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria and they are also active in most European opposition parties. They all consider our political and economic elites arrogant and corrupt. Populism likes to be thought of as a quest for direct democracy but is actually giving *the saying* to a dictator who, is convinced, *trumpwise*, to express the will of the folk.

Contemporary populism results from the frustration and bitterness of the elderly that see their world declining swiftly as well as the anger and frustration of the young who want to live in a different Europe but who stumble upon the iron wall of their impotence which they sense as a form of *democratic deficit*.

TERRORISM:

A record number of terrorist attacks were planned, foiled or carried out in European Union countries this year including Nice attack in France, Brussels attack in Belgium, an explosion at an airport in Istanbul and several others in Germany.

Time after time, France bears the brunt of terrorism with more people leaving to join the ISIS and other jihadi ranks in Iraq and Syria. According to data released by The International Centre of Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (based on data from second half of 2014) as published in the Wall Street Journal, nearly 1200 people had joined jihadist ranks from France alone in Iraq and Syria, followed by Germany and Britain.

2017 MAY PROVE TO BE EVEN MORE UNPREDICTABLE THAN 2016; BLUNTLY PUT 2017 IS BEYOND EVERY PREDICTION.

What is doomed to happen in 2017? Probably much more of the same and more dramatically: the near agony for the European Union.

By the end of 2017 there will be new leaders not only in the United States but also in France Germany and even Italy.

Nationalist protectionism is on the agenda in China, Brazil, the USA and even Europe which is sure to have a devastating impact upon growth all over the world. Terrorism is most likely to strike again with increasing violence. The only difficult question is where the next attacks will take place. Less and less likely in Syria, most likely in Europe, Turkey and eventually the United States.

Likewise it is hard to predict where and when the skirmishes between the States and China between Ukraine and Russia are to take place as it makes no doubt they will soon break out. International tension is very unlikely to recede. The new US president is probably going to accelerate world disorder. At the same time the legitimacy of political elites will be more and more questioned possibly in a violent way, perhaps like in the thirties.

The middle class is in the lift in Asia and Africa and in swift decline in Europe and the States. Big money will be more and more criticized in the name of solidarity equality and the Human Rights.

We are in for all sorts of surprises which means that we ought to become still more flexible adaptable and adjustable and open to change, mobility, even exile.

We are in for new battles against decline, resignation and adversity

We'd better favor altruism to egoism helping everyone to create a more benevolent environment. More empathy is required to prompt resilience, resistance and efficiency.

Therefore it is wise to prepare for the worse while helping altruistically for the better.

But on the other hand, and by contrast, there is no denying that the world has on the whole gradually become a better place to live in.

THE EUROPEAN UNION IS FACING A DRAMATIC CRISIS

The European crisis is both an institutional but more than anything it proves to be an identity crisis which may have a formidable impact on the coming decades. But what exactly is this hypothetical European identity basically about? A common history, a common civilization (historically, artistically, politically, economically, socially...)? A common basket of values ?

For professor David Engels (Brussels University) *a collective identity cannot result from a choice but must come on the contrary from an acceptance or even adaptation of all elements of a common two-thousand-year past.* Who therefore is to tackle such an educational challenge if not *Eyes of Europe*? Engels compares the present situation in Europe with that of the Roman Republic. Before the arrival of Cesar, and the empire, the republic was faced with similar challenges: the issues of Roman Citizenship, migratory fluxes, the decay of art and the terrible issue of porous frontiers.

The European crisis is not only institutional, it is in essence a crisis of identity and that is essential for its survival. The European community is not only in crisis; it has literally become the crisis.

DECLINE OF THE WEST, SPENGLER REVISITED

after Adda B. Bozeman

Few questions have preoccupied Western minds as insistently as those which probe the reasons for the rise and fall, or the progress and decline.

The Second World War ultimately resulted in a marked spatial contraction of the West's domain and the serious loss of strategic control in world affairs—tendencies that have since been confirmed and furthered by Euro-American policies as recorded, for example, in the Helsinki agreement of 1973.

ALL LIFE IS CHANGE.

Spengler was convinced that *the full measure of life can be discovered only when decline and decay are perceived and assessed as clearly as beginning and becoming.*

The vital question is, Spengler insists, what does it *mean* to be a Roman, a Persian or a European? And, to him the answer can be found and formulated only after one has come to terms with the given group's "unity of experience."

Since a culture—and it usually encompasses different but fundamentally like-minded peoples or nations—is such a field of unified human experience, the fact must be accepted that there are as many cultures as there are distinct modes of experiencing unity in thought and life styles. Indeed.

But is there is such thing as a common European culture or/and civilization? Definitely yes. But is this European culture actually taught in our decaying national and regional school structures?

Are our common values being conveyed to all our young European citizens?

The answer is definitely no? Eyes of Europe sees it at its duty and mission to tackle that issue energetically. In the way Voice of America was keeping our western and American democratic values alive during the dark Nazi era or in the way the Open University has been teaching millions of British and European citizens the spiritual European heritage on university level for more than four decades.

According to Spengler, Western Europe's Faustian culture, which began to unfold itself in the 10th century A.D., reached its autumn period in the 18th century and began its wintering phase during the 19th century, i.e. nine hundred years after its inception.

HOW ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS WITHIN EUROPE?

Spengler goes on the assumption that cultures are mutually incomprehensible in the sense that *the denizens of one cannot fully understand the ideas and values guiding men in another culture.*

That is ignoring the dynamic of world globalization that abolishes frontiers and deconstructs cultural walls of all kinds to turn them into bridges. Cultural borrowing is resulting from *interactions between the cultures of the Near East and Western Europe.* But not only them... In the transition from “culture” to “civilization full bloom”, there stands the miracle of the **Cosmopolis** which Spengler portrays in the following way: *It is the most artificial, the cleverest phenomenon manifested in the lightworld of human eyes.* And cosmopolitanism is exactly what Europe is witnessing and experiencing right now.

Nationalism is anxious to combat it whereas Eyes of Europe sees it the best alternative to decline.

Reflections on the future of states and nations in the Occident led Spengler to conclude that *it falls to us to live in the most trying times known to the history of a great culture and that this challenge must be met.*

The 1960s were built on a generational conflict and it would be a good thing if there was another today. The older generation should not be forgiven for what they have done and they won't be from the conversations I have had with the young. Just because they wear jeans and listen to Led Zeppelin doesn't make them liberal. Never trust anyone over 30. Again, in contrast with traditional education that fails more and more to understand the young, it is for Eyes of Europe to cope with a new generation of mutant youngsters who have learnt on internet to communicate, eat, love and live differently. And even more dramatically: to learn differently.

EUROPEAN CITIZENS ARE NO LONGER KIDS. THEY WANT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY. (Jean-Marc Ferry)

And so do European teenagers.

Ferry is referring to the *European process* to describe routine negotiations between all sorts of interest groups that gather around the siege of the Commission in Brussels; also about techno-bureaucratic and semi-private lobbyists furthermore about inter-governmental agencies etc. Basically it is about compromises that are not exceedingly democratic, to put it mildly.

To professor Jean-Marc Ferry (Université de Nantes; Université libre de Bruxelles) *it is high time for a drastic change in style* and therefore to create a virtual **public agora** that tackles the political issues of the European continent (*mettre en arène publique des enjeux et des problèmes de l'Union*).

A radical change in style is indeed urgently required.

Whether representative, participative or deliberative, democracy is indeed, so to say, invisible on a European level.

Ferry makes no bones about it: *The citizens must eventually but swiftly be associated and involved in the European decision-making process.*

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE EUROPEANS; BUT HOW?

How to make sure that every European citizen feels involved in the European project. That may be the hugest challenge Europe is to tackle in the coming years if it is to survive and escape the massive reject that is taking place under the rising pressure of nationalist, populist Europhobe parties across the old continent.

Some philosophers around Habermas see the European identity as *a way to open oneself to other cultures*.

It is one thing to manage and run a cultural and civilizational patrimony (EoE 's first priority); it is quite another thing and EoE's second first priority to develop a sort of *common relational, communicational identity*. ("*développer une identité relationnelle, communicationnelle*"). But that is basically what it all comes down to.

This definitely requires *a pluralistic approach as well as a systematic training in the art of open discussion, confrontation and a critical mind*.

And that is precisely what Eyes of Europe a *selflearning* European platform wants to offer millions of young Europeans in English and in real time.

Eyes of Europe is a didactic democratic virtual **agora** that offers communicative exchange upon the burning issues that concern young European mutants. Mutants in the sense that they have gradually become *self-learners* autodidacts that teach one another and that are capable of fishing information and content on the various internet networks like no generation before them.

This **Eyes of Europe agora** is meant to forge a plural identity for all Young European citizens across Europe old and new.

Of course there isn't such a thing as a *European Folk* yet let alone a European public opinion but that can be changed within one generation.

What is urgently needed is a radically newly structured version of Europe with a collective European education as an obligatory prerequisite to generate a really unified European democracy. What we generally call the House of Europe will otherwise remain a giant with clay feet that is threatened to stumble and eventually collapse over turbulences and turmoil such as those we have witnessed in 2016 that may to dismantle it t any time soon.

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