



Europe in a State of Denial

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The European political class as a whole is in a state of denial. Polarization between ideologically different political parties tends to occur in an ever narrowing circle of political views and solutions. There is a clear difference between parties that defend rights and parties that attack rights (in the case of the far-right), but is this enough to distinguish the left from the right? It will certainly not be enough to face the two great challenges that question to the limit both the relationship between humanity and nature (the impending ecological catastrophe) and human coexistence (artificial intelligence). The circle of the politically possible has narrowed and within it the political class pushes itself to mark differences that, in fact, are more rhetorical than real. The denial lies in accepting this state of affairs as an inevitability.

The immediate cause of the qualitative reduction of politically addressable problems and the consequent expansion of unapproachable problems is the war in Ukraine—the war itself, its continuation and possible expansion. But the continuation of the war is only the latest episode in the rivalry between the United States and Europe as global centers of capitalist accumulation. From the 1970s onwards, the United States realized that its undisputed hegemony in the world economy



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after World War II was being challenged by two powers whose political existence had become dependent on the United States at the end of the war: Western Europe and Japan.

Europe's prosperity was partly based on this dependence (negligible military spending), but was also due to the creation of the common market, unequal (neocolonial) relations with former colonies, the normalization of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union (Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*), the intensification of economic relations with post-Soviet Russia (cheap gas and oil) and the entire former Eastern bloc. While Japan began to struggle in the 1990s, Europe, now economically led by Germany, remained the rival ally of the United States, while China, without the World War II dependencies on the United States, emerged as another rival and a much more difficult power to control.

The end of Europe's relative prosperity began with the submission to neoliberalism of the least democratically controlled European institutions (European Commission and Central Bank) and ends with the submission to the geostrategic designs of the United States: the war in Ukraine, a war in Europe whose outcome depends exclusively on the United States. The crisis is, for now, more visible in the center of the European economy (Germany and France) and may even mean momentarily some stimulus for the peripheries (e.g., Portugal and Spain), but the historical tendency is for Europe to be tied to the decline of the United States and without alternative. That is why the circle of possible policies will continue to tighten. The response to social protests that may arise can only be a repressive response, as we are seeing in France and will see tomorrow in other countries.

By ceasing to be a world power, Europe loses the possibility of being a leader in the discussion of the problems that most challenge contemporary societies. Therefore, they cease to be addressed and become part of the state of denial. The four main problems are: ecological transition; knowledge, culture and ethics; social cohesion and demodiversity; peace.

Ecological Transition

On ecological transition there is not much to invent: renewable energy matrix, quality public rail transport, water as a strategic and scarce good, ruralization of cities (urban gardens, local employment, greater sovereignty over time), food sovereignty, and agroecology. Given that the 23 richest countries are responsible for 50 percent of CO² emissions and given that the climate crisis, although global, affects much more severely the countries of the global South, with some at risk of total or partial disappearance (as is the case of Bangladesh), it is unacceptable for the global South that the global North continues to discard its historical responsibilities in this area and transfers to the countries of the global South the responsibility of solving the climate crisis, when it does not turn it into another business opportunity.

Knowledge, Culture, and Ethics

Three challenges dominate. The separation between good and truth, between ethics and science, was a revolutionary achievement; but it allowed science to become a productive force and submit to capitalist logic, and, therefore, today it only contributes to the problems we face if the solutions mean more capitalism—that is, more exclusion and more polarization. Artificial intelligence symbolizes the paroxysm of the risks of technology without ethics. On the other hand, scientific specialization was another achievement that today needs a counterpoint, otherwise we will no longer see even the trees, much less the forest. All sciences are social and human, and only culture and the humanities can bring about the urgent reunion between ethics and truth. This reunion is only possible outside the limits of Eurocentrism. This is why I have been proposing the epistemologies of the South for which science is valid knowledge, but it is not the only valid knowledge.

Modern science only answers questions that can be formulated scientifically, but many of the questions that make it possible to bring together the search for the good (ethics and politics) with the search for truth cannot be scientifically formulated. What is happiness? What is the meaning of life? Are the ancestors with us? Are we responsible for those to come? The potential of science is only valued if its limits are known.

Social Cohesion and Demodiversity

The third challenge is that of growing social polarization within each country. Liberal reformism (which dominated the entire twentieth century) ended with the rise of neoliberalism. Promises to improve living conditions are only possible for the governing parties when they are in opposition. The growth of the extreme right feeds on the culture of hatred and a policy of exclusion and discrimination. The triumph of liberalism conferred legitimacy on liberal representative democracy, but today it is further than ever from its ideal: the government of the majorities for the benefit of the majorities. In this period of historical regression, representative democracy alone cannot effectively defend itself against anti-democrats. It must be complemented by forms of participatory and direct democracy (demodiversity). With migration, possible social cohesion cannot mean assimilation or uniformity. It has to combine social redistribution with interculturality and with the recognition of cultural, racial, sexual, regional, ableist, religious, and age diversity.

Peace

Finally, polarization between countries and between regions will increase in the coming decades as the modern world system evolves from unipolarity to multipolarity. The growth of military budgets in almost all countries is a disturbing sign that the fragmentation of the world and the resulting instability will have violence and war as its main response. Peace will be the scarcest commodity after water.

In Europe, none of these problems are on the political agenda of the parties. What will it take to overcome this denial? Either the European Union is reinvented to include Russia and Turkey, NATO is removed from the center of political decisions and European institutions are democratized, or the EU is dissolved and the various European countries, with the pyrrhic increase in sovereignty this brings them, can ask to join existing or emerging blocs. Some will prefer to join the British Empire bloc (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia), others will prefer the BRICS. In the latter case, this will be the first experience in five centuries of European countries entering into equal (non-colonial) relations with the non-European world.

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