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The New Challenges to the Euro-American relationship: Russia and the Middle East

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*The example of a great nation
in which the rights of man are respected
is useful to all other nations, irrespective of the
differences in climate, customs and constitutions*
Condorcet (referring to the USA), 1786

We have not reached the “end of history”, but this is one of its crossroads, a hinge, like Westphalia in 1648, Vienna in 1815, Versailles in 1919, San Francisco in 1945 (or the soon forgotten Paris in 1990). We are all, in other words, once again ‘present at the creation’. Not much further than the square one that Roosevelt and Truman established seventy years ago. The “winds of change” that Harold MacMillan detected in 1956¹ are blowing anew.

International relations have to cope with unprecedented situations, in what is essentially a systemic transition from traditional power-politics to global cooperative endeavors. Having discovered that military might is not decisive anymore, that deterrence cannot apply to non-state troublemakers and terrorists, and that, both regionally and globally, self-protective instincts prevail over international solidarity. While borders do not mean much anymore, state sovereignty makes a comeback. A mixture of inherent contradictions, that only a new international paradigm can cope with, and that only ‘the West’ appears able, if less willing, to provide.

The Euro-American relationship² is sickly, out of prolonged neglect, acquired bad habits and the resulting indifference. In the ‘old continent’, the anti-American syndrome of many a leftist group in the Sixties and Seventies has turned into a more pervasive annoyance with Washington doing either too much or too little in Europe’s stead: a resentment without emancipation, as it were. Similarly, across the Atlantic, the usual criticism resurfaces about Europe not carrying its fair share of the international burden, not only militarily, but also in political and economic terms. A situation that even the financial crisis, President Obama’s ‘disengagement’ or Putin’s Crimean grab have so far proved unable to traumatize back into shape. A state of affairs that cannot be allowed to linger, as it spreads the impression that the transatlantic relationship has lost its original vision and its very inner identity, thus becoming internationally irrelevant. Oswald Spengler’s century-old ‘decline of the West’ prediction is again upon us, apparently sapping the political energy out of its leaders and

¹ At the time of Suez and Budapest; which ushered in decolonization.

² Throughout the text, I will use the terms ‘trans- Atlantic’ whenever the Atlantic Alliance is implied, and ‘Euro-American’ when referring to the broader relationship.

public opinion alike. Prematurely, as we will try to argue. Which is what the Americans and Europeans should jointly demonstrate.

When the Wall fell, a re-invigorated West hailed the dawn of a ‘new world order’, which was not actually new, as it implied in essence reverting to the UN Charter³. Starting with the reintegration of a Europe “whole and free”, a process that involved initially the support and cooperation of Gorbachev’s Russia, through the NATO-Russia Council and a EU ‘strategic partnership’, in the broader framework of the OSCE. Abruptly, ‘nine/eleven’ changed all that, tearing the international fabric apart. Since then, we all learned that military might has become obsolete, i.e. ineffective, inconclusive. After a couple of decades of muddling through, and Putin’s Russia changing course, the developments in Syria, Ukraine and Mesopotamia are again straining and discrediting a West that could not prevent or intervene adequately in them. Yet, when the predicaments become extreme, it is always to ‘the West’ that the world’s attention turns to, expecting it to come to the rescue. In spite of President Obama’s proclaimed intention to have America take a step back, the US remains the ‘indispensable nation’ in the steadying of international situations. Hopefully, with the Europeans in tow.

Increasingly dramatic world events challenge not only the integrated military structure of NATO, but also the underlying political texture of the Atlantic Alliance. After half a century of European free-riding, followed by ‘ad hoc’ expeditionary operations, the transatlantic partnership is presently reminded of its original political and operational purpose, albeit in quite different international circumstances. It must now demonstrate, not so much its ability to respond, but rather its enduring willingness to continue in its attempt to steer the future world prospects. The nature of the issues that need to be addressed hasn’t changed, but there are no clear-cut answers on how best to ensure some measure of world governance.

The Euro-American relationship has always been a “troubled partnership”, as Kissinger described it as far back as 1965⁴: a house divided, geographically, structurally, functionally; yet indispensable to this very day, not only for world stability but also for the cohesiveness of an enlarged Europe. The end of the Cold War was supposed to send it out of business; it went instead ‘out of area’, beyond its territorial purview, with mixed results and further inner stress, while its European component failed to come up with a consistent political and military contribution of its own. Which resulted in anti-Americanism and anti-Europeanism bouncing off the respective shores.

As a wit appropriately summed it up, after the fall of the Wall (‘eleven/ nine’) ‘we all went shopping’: assuming that things would take care of themselves. The enlargements of both NATO and the EU occurred as a logical result, automatically, almost absent-mindedly. Until New York’s

³ in “the resumption of the pursuit of ends which the use of Soviet force had interrupted”, as Acheson lamented when ‘present at the (previous) creation’ (*A Democrat looks at his Party*”, Harper & Bros, New York, 1955).

⁴ In *The Troubled partnership: a reappraisal of the Western Alliance*”, McGraw Hill, New York, 1965. Which is what Pres. Kennedy had also tried to remedy to, suggesting a ‘twin pillar’ that never came to fruition

terrible wake-up call ('nine/eleven') shook the world's conscience and led to the 'war on terror', with the ensuing knee-jerk, one-sided interventions in Afghanistan, in Iraq, etc. etc. The international stability and security having apparently spun out of control, NATO was called back into action, as the only operational tool-box available. Which resulted in its political significance being gradually lost. The UK tried to restore its 'special relationship' with Washington (producing an unexpected backlash on both Blair and Bush junior); France, under Chirac, found it expedient to reassert its 'special status' (until Sarkozy, and now Hollande, reversed course); reunited Germany became America's main 'phone number' while clinging to its own *sonderweg* (in order to shirk responsibilities in military matters); Italy remains in mid-stream (inclining towards the US whenever it loses its grip on Europe).

The transatlantic relationship managed nevertheless to prove its mettle during the European institutional enlargement, a demand- rather than supply-driven process, requiring NATO's security guarantees to open the way for the EU's economic follow-up. A result that Gorbachev embraced and Putin now reneges, which is what deprives the West of wider and more conclusive results, adding to the distorted impression that the Atlantic alliance is in a shambles, unable to cope with the new global challenges.

America's assertive ('together when we can, alone if we must') approach has run into many shortcomings and counterproductive results, leading to President Obama's election on a platform of 'retrenchment' from direct international involvement, with the ensuing 'don't do stupid stuff' and 'lead from behind' short-hand labels. The White House, not without many a dispute with the Republican opposition, has reached out beyond its traditional allies, extending its hand to new 'partners' in the Arab world, even to Iran, trying to 'reset' the relationship with Moscow, 'pivoting' to Asia in seeking a more productive relationship with China. The response has not been very encouraging, turning even tragically negative as evildoers took advantage of what was wrongly perceived as a strategic void that a retreating US was leaving in its wake. As a result, the Crimean 'coup' and the 'caliphate' folly have put the Euro-American relationship back center-stage. In the never-ending pendulum of international relations.

The new security environment, ambiguously labeled as 'post-modern'⁵, with the new transnational challenges that result from it, calls upon the Euro-American partnership to reassess its inner conviction and sense of purpose. The West cannot prove decisive any more, but it still retains the critical mass needed to encourage others to follow suit, as the UN Charter would have it. It's the underlying intentions, rather than precise contingency plans hard to define in such a confused world scene, which must be revisited and narrated anew, as a backdrop to a hopefully broader, even if diversified, international involvement in concurring endeavors. The new strains surfacing in the Atlantic Alliance should not obfuscate the corresponding new opportunities. The tasks are

⁵ i.e. the post-balance of power, cooperative security system underpinning Francis Fukuyama's *End of History* and John Ikenberry's *Liberal Leviathan*.

unprecedented and therefore need to be argued out, both domestically and internationally, as they are woven into any joint operational texture.

Fundamentally, the reintegration of the international system is the overriding reason that requires ‘the West’ to continue taking the initiative: if not as the pivot of a new world order it has contributed so much to bring about, at least as a stabilizing factor, much as the graphite rod that controls the nuclear fuel cycle. The American role remains essential in keeping the world focused on the ‘international liberalism’ that Woodrow Wilson’s ‘fourteen points’ invoked. Such a prospect requires however not so much the resolve of single-minded allies, as the concurring, even if not always up-front, involvement of an increasing number of like-minded partners⁶. It should of course be primarily up to Europe to pick up the slack, contributing its soft/smart power to the more coherent and visible carrot-and-stick, civil/military combination that global circumstances nowadays require.

In the new world scenarios, deterrence is obviously not as effective as during the good-old MAD days; worse, the US ‘globocop’ has repeatedly let it be known that it is sick and tired of pulling every chestnut out of the fire⁷. Still, many an international actor, even if ‘otherwise engaged’ (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, apart from Russia and China) relies upon the West intervening, in the pursuit of different national advantages. A ‘softening’ of the American profile, which Europe should contribute to, could therefore prove quite useful not only in the enduring situations where the balance of power still reigns supreme, but also in the many circumstances where cooperative, normative networks develop, i.e., in the trade, environment, energy negotiations. Reconciling the double-face ‘indispensable’ versus ‘reluctant sheriff’ nation implies reducing America’s overextended involvement while nudging the Europeans forward. Essentially reverting to the ‘ethical realism’ approach, i.e. the combination of the longer-term ideal goal with shorter-term ad hoc, pragmatic actions, that Niebuhr called for in the similar transitional situation towards the end of the second world war. In the appropriate mix of dissuasion and persuasion, firmness and willingness to compromise: internationally, the new civilian-military approach to crisis management and conflict settlement nowadays requires it; domestically, the hiatus in international matters, between the American retrenchment and the European integration process, is narrowing⁸. In other words, as many a Renaissance painter has illustrated, Mars and Venus can become the best of companions (possibly with Athena, the Wise, in attendance)⁹.

⁶ Jurgen Habermas speaks of “the ability to promote common actions without predetermining the result we would like them to achieve” (in his *The Divided West*). Echoing what Acheson maintained in 1955: “the task of leadership in a free coalition is the task of obtaining and maintaining consent to common policies and programs” (op.cit. in note 1).

⁷ As far back as Baker’s ‘no dog in this fight’, when the Balkans started to blow apart (having to backtrack when things went out of control, and the European ‘fine moment’ came and went).

⁸ Even in social and economic policies, domestically, as the US becomes more welfare-oriented and Europe more laissez-faire.

⁹ Robert Kagan, who came up with that simile, now argues, together with his Brookings colleague Martin Indik (in the *New York Times International*), that “everything the United States wants to accomplish in the world can be better accomplished with the help of and cooperation of our allies”. Vice-President Biden, at the *Wehrkunde* of 2013 put it

When all is said and done, world events certify that the center of gravity is still in Europe. At least as long as Putin's attitude remains a stumbling block on the road to the reintegration of the continent and, consequently, of the international system as a whole. The West should not, maybe, continue to boast that it has been and still is the benevolent master of a universe it has contributed to democratize along the lines drawn up decades ago in San Francisco. But it can (and must) still constitute its engine, as events world-wide prove that it constitutes the only international actor willing to carry water to the mill of history. Its defining contribution is pluralism (the brand of democracy) in the direction of a global *agora*, wherein a more accurate redefinition of international relationships can best occur. Starting, possibly, with Europe's own back-yard and proximate neighborhood.

Indeed, the least that can be said is that neither the Arab states nor Russia¹⁰ are adapting well to globalization. The general thrust of the EU's 'neighborhood policies', addressed simultaneously to the Eastern European successor states of the USSR, to the Western Balkans and to the Mediterranean partners, does not discriminate between them, in that it expresses its willingness to engage in incremental cooperative endeavors with all of them, not leading necessarily to full membership. The EU's gravitational pull has thus proven to be the alternative to a military clout it does not have, nor seeks¹¹. The parallel tracks followed by NATO and the EU enlargements have however provided Putin with the pretext to turn ostensibly its back on the 'strategic partnership' that Brussels had suggested and that Moscow has consistently shunned, rejecting the implicit 'aggressive' impact of its conditionalities, declaredly incompatible with the traditions of Russian civilization. Thus raising another clash-of-civilisations issue, openly contradicting Gorbaciov's *perestroika*'s emphatic statement that ideological confrontation was over, and that a more equal relationships between Europe, America and Russia would benefit the common interests of the continent and of the world at large.

The turmoil in the Mediterranean basin must also be addressed jointly, in its quite separate origins and components between its Middle-Eastern and Northern-African components. The way-out common to both can nevertheless only be in the gradual establishment of a comprehensive inter-Arab approach (benefiting also sub-Saharan Africa), with outside political encouragement and negotiating assistance. Post-war history has demonstrated that Europe and America cannot suffice, as the influence of the whole international community, particularly of Russia as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council, should be brought to bear (which could also occasionally divert the Kremlin's mind off its Ukrainian obsession).

even more forcefully: "Europe is the cornerstone of our commitment with the rest of the world ... the catalyzer of our global cooperation".

¹⁰ Both of them relying on their oil, rather than on shared markets.

¹¹ Apart from the fact that, as Zbigniew Brzezinsy maintained In an article entitled *A Geostategy for Eurasia*, on the September/October 1997 issue of Foreign Affairs, "any expansion of the EU's political scopeis automatically an expansion of American influence".

So far, in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Iraq again (apart from here and there in Africa), and now with respect to Ukraine and the ISIS, the Euro-American track record has been hesitant, at times confused and confusing, when not openly divergent; and the results widely disputed all around, the exit strategies as conscience-wrenching as the decision to intervene, both of them always unilaterally.

What then does the road ahead look like? Lest it loses its very soul and identity, even in the absence of interlocutors, especially in the Security Council, with whom to share its concerns and intentions, the West cannot disavow its determination to try and remedy the most serious shortcomings of a world in transition, while keeping an eye, of course, on the mirror of an always critical public opinion, domestic and foreign. If unable to steer events, the Euro-American relationship's added-value in terms of political influence or negotiating weight, can still be relied upon, if only to contain them¹².

Putin's behavior in Ukraine resulted in restoring NATO's core business, political rather than merely securitarian. Washington and Brussels should link arms in rejecting the argument that their enlargement policies have military implications against Russia. On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that, even in Europe, the many critical circumstances (and 'hybrid wars') might not always require a military 'trip-wire' strategy. 'Out-of-area' tasks should be undertaken as needed, although in the form of last-resort, possibly 'over-the-horizon' expeditionary operations, enlisting in the process any like-minded, converging fellow-traveller, in result-oriented, ad-hoc coalitions which would gradually increase the number of stake-holders in a more stable, predictable, world; regardless of their 'human rights record', which should not be considered a prerequisite, but may instead become an additional result. Which could allow for the convergence of security and stabilization responsibility-taking, sedimenting a participatory, plural albeit rules-based international system. Given the current blockage of the Security Council, the multilateral process promoted by the UN would thus be revived from the outside, through actions that, even when not strictly legal by the book, are legitimate to the extent that respect its spirit of the Charter and increase international consensus.

Once again 'at the creation', the Euro-American 'West', with its Australian, New Zealanders, Japanese and assorted other associates, must of course engage in a renewed, improved narrative¹³; mostly, in order to describe its intentions, restate and revive the principles that underpin them, solicit and enlist multilateral, albeit diversified, participation. The pattern should not lead to uniform performances, but rather in the concurrent compatibility of individual behaviors, much like the gyroscope in an airplane. Democracy cannot and should not be exported, being quite able to

¹² thus keeping alive Kennan containment theory's prescription to apply pressure not across the boards, but especially at critical junctions.

¹³ "We don't even tell our story very well, these days", was one of Hillary Clinton's comments as she relinquished the Department of State.

export itself nowadays in the public squares of the world: not in a one-size-fits-all model, as it consists in a participatory pluralism. Post-modernity would thereby establish its trade-mark in the spontaneous transition of international relations from the traditional intergovernmental balance of forces into a cooperative (i.e., convergent) and comprehensive (i.e., multi-faceted) security network, that many a 'rogue' may violently and spectacularly object to, but cannot force to reverse course. In an incremental approach that allows for the occasional parting of ways, providing that they do not result in cross-purposes.

More than a decade ago, in December 2003, the then High Representative of the EU, Javier Solana (a former Secretary General of NATO) came up, under his own authority, with a 'European Security Strategy'. Its basic tenets were not far removed from the then just revised US strategy: stressing the need for threat prevention and force projection, and identifying 'failed states' as the overriding concern¹⁴. Not much of a blueprint for the EU to act upon, but an important recognition nevertheless that Europe had finally realized, alongside the US and NATO, the need to pull its act together, in order to achieve what was described as "effective multilateralism". Since then, as the world scene became much more intricate, with the addition of global financial woes, Middle-Eastern instability and Russia reverting to Soviet-style obstructionism, Brussels did not cover much more conceptual, political or operational ground. Rightly so, some argue, as a more articulated and assertive European security agenda, in the absence of a more a coherent trans-Atlantic relationship, would have been scorned as 'a mouse that roars'¹⁵.

In any case, one should admit that the European Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) will never rise above an improved coherence and coordination of national policies with respect to shifting international contingencies, which will need to be addressed with different interstate combinations ('variable geometries', 'reinforced structured cooperations'). In any case, a more credible European influence in world affairs will not stem from an overwhelming military might (which the EU is in any case genetically unwilling to wield or contribute to), but rather from a demonstrable ability to generate the appropriate combination of military reassurance, economic sanctions or inducements, and diplomatic persuasion. With respect, in particular, to the 'belt of instability', of 'frozen conflicts', that still divide our continent. An unfinished business, which Putin's Russia is clearly unwilling to tackle as, in the footsteps of the 2008 events in Georgia, they provide the 'foot in the door' that Moscow wants to maintain. An issue which the EU cannot address single-handedly: quite apart from the supposed division between 'old' and 'new' Europe,

¹⁴ Its most forceful statement was: "We need to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid and, when necessary, robust intervention ... We need to be able to act before countries around us deteriorate, when signs of proliferation are detected, and before humanitarian emergencies arise".

¹⁵ Yet, both the EU and President Obama have, almost concurrently, been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, an indication of the expectations they raised rather than their achievements.

it's a matter of working out with America not so much a common front, as much as a shared, albeit diversified, strategy. A double pronged approach which Russia may eventually decide to relate to.

The relevant decalogue was drawn up long ago, with the Helsinki CSCE Final Act agreed upon in 1975 by every European state, that proved instrumental for Moscow's eventual acceptance, under Gorbachev, of the need for a 'common European house'. A commitment that Putin blatantly reneged, blocking the road (just as Stalin in 1945) to a common pan-European engagement.

World-wide, when all is said and done, the nagging question, remains (as an *Economist's* cover recently put it): "What would America fight for?"; indicating the nagging anxiety that it might simply not turn up when and as expected. It is not so much a matter, as some fear, of the 'old continent' having to fend off for itself as America disengages, resetting and pivoting its relations with the rest of the world; but rather of rearranging the furniture in our trans-Atlantic home. Making it more inhabitable as a political center of gravity, the linchpin as it were, for the reintegration of the entire system of international relations.

The unending issue of 'burden-sharing' has become much more than a matter of defense budgets, implying instead a closer coordination of strategic agendas, from which the military expenditures would derive. It implies also more decision-sharing. The answer to the above question, therefore, should first and foremost be addressed in a more thorough, systematic, Euro-American consultative process, according to art. IV of the Washington Treaty: much further upstream that has so far been the case: i.e., usually at the very last minute, in emergency situations, for operative, not political coordination purposes¹⁶. With the aim to address the broader and longer-term strategic backdrop to the otherwise maddening day-to-day events: i.e., identifying jointly the relevant issues, analyzing their components, assessing the threat they constitute, establishing the priorities, and distributing the respective tasks as needed, much before the requirement arises of deciding on the respective, coordinated actions that may be required. In the appropriate mixture of Europe's preventive, persuasive, soft role, and the US' prescriptive, admonishing, hard attitude. With a sprinkle of smart power, for both of them.

The US should still be instrumental, also, to ensure the political coherence and operational cohesion among its European partners. The European center of gravity having already moved eastwards, the 'new-Europeans'¹⁷ have acquired more visibility, and a better hearing, in Washington than the 'old' ones, that appear skeptical and cynical (until, that is, they suddenly spring into action, particularly France and Britain, members of the Security Council; without always bothering to weave their policies into the European fabric, as they should). For the foreseeable future, America will therefore remain the 'external federative factor', the glue that keeps its allies together (if not always in line) in the recurring times of need.

¹⁶ A requirement that has been felt from the very beginning of the Western association. As far back as 1950, Luigi Salvatorelli, observing that "American public opinion has long been displeased with Europe", urged the novel allies to "talk to each other with the utmost frankness".

¹⁷ To whom Pres. Obama has assured "rock support" against Putin's aggressive attitude.

The West should concentrate its attention on enhancing the integrity of the international system that it has so much contributed to establish (and that Russia now prominently contributes to destabilize). No other overwhelming challenge is in sight. The ‘rise of the Rest’ is part and parcel of what the West has been working on since the end of the Second World War in the assumption, recorded in the Charter of the United Nations, that it would produce a more coherent and caring world community. The intention hasn’t faded away. The BRICS have now joined forces in order to acquire a more prominent status in world affairs; but their geo-political situations and ambitions are quite dissimilar, and they seem unwilling or unable to undertake the corresponding responsibilities on a world scale. Instead, they seem bent upon achieving a multipolar world; which would imply a new division in spheres of influence writ-large!

The West has long taken a different course. It was the West (the assorted members of the family) that, during the whole last century, determined the shape the world has taken, ushering in a cooperative rather than balance-of-forces security system: promoting democratization throughout the international system, particularly with the decolonization and ‘state-building’ process (which Islamic fundamentalists now object to and fight against); engineering the globalization of trade, financial flows and communications (an achievement that a reappearance of tribalism now disputes); in other words, spreading pluralism, the defining element of democracy, in a rules-based world system for one and all, big and small, to partake in; with, of course, all the promises, unintended consequences and drawbacks that it entails; but with the transparency of intentions that cannot be denied and should not be misinterpreted.

In present international circumstances, after muddling through for too long, the only possible ‘grand strategy’, the shared political vision, should be to re-invigorate multilateralism throughout the system of international relations, restore the norms and standards of behavior conducive to the ‘international liberalism’ originally invoked by Wilson and then revived by FDR and Truman; only to be stopped in its tracks then by Stalin (and now Putin?). That is indeed the direction in which President Obama is steering America away from unilateralism, matching the EU’s proclaimed commitment to ‘effective multilateralism’. America’s impatience about decisive results and Europe’s attachment to painstaking cooperative processes should not be, nor be seen, as contradictory, but instead as possibly complementary approaches, in a combination of their respective hard and soft (smart?) components. The ‘organizing principle’ for the ‘new transatlantic bargain’ that some call for should be anchored in a shared global political vision of common interests, besides the shared, but always hard to define, ideal values.

Which requires no redrafting or reinterpreting of the Washington Treaty, the political relevance of which is still adequate to present European and world circumstances. NATO’s 2010 ‘Strategic concept’ has spelled out the three objectives, borne out by present international

circumstances: preserve collective defense, prevent and manage crises, and provide “security cooperation with neighbors and more distant partners” (i.e., adopting common approaches to international security). Which must translate, as events have shown, in the appropriate mix of ‘cooperative security capabilities’, for a tighter interoperability of expeditionary missions and post-conflict civilian support, in cooperation with other regional organizations. In other words, the transatlantic relationship should evolve into a force multiplier, politically and operationally, energizing the whole international system back to life. And providing the EU with the terms of reference necessary to develop a proper defense policy (and procurement) of its own; which cannot emerge in the abstract.

Speaking to Chancellor Merkel over Ukraine, Obama observed that “we are not perfectly aligned yet, but we share the same values and the same concerns”. It is only by walking side by side, with their obviously different characteristics, that the EU and the US will be able to sharpen their shared international visibility, credibility, attractiveness, and thereby both their separate and joint effectiveness on the world scene. Dispelling their apparent lack of resolve, and their confused (confusing) chain of leadership. Which should not become a test of their ability to wield military power, impose legality, achieve compromise, but rather of their capability to influence the course of events in the wide-open marketplace that the world has become and that modern communications foster. In which a Carnegie-inspired ability to win friends and influence people may show the way to the more promising socio-economic future that the many expressions of popular discontent, everywhere, yearn for¹⁸.

After many a disappointment, Washington admits nowadays that it is not only up to its European partners to put their act together. Europe is not without international leverage, both economic and political, but cannot go it alone: it has always been demand-driven (‘more for more’), rarely taking the lead, but always supportive of the initiatives that others may take. Conversely, the Europeans should take a ‘harder’ look at America. At the end of the war, while grumbling at FDR over his attitude towards the USSR, Churchill sighed that “the Americans are what they are, but they are the only Americans we have”. With whom, after over half a century of a subordinate (and comfortable) position, the Europeans should now try to establish a more equal relationship, to the benefit of both, and of the world at large.

The Monnet roundabout economic approach towards European integration has finally set the foundations of a political union, which must now be built and find its allotted place on the world scene. The time has therefore come when the Euro-American relationship should stand on its two-legs. Which, with the addition of a free-trade area, could then be extended to the Latin American

¹⁸ Since 1979, when Khomeini changed the course of Middle Eastern history, the population of Iran, Egypt and other Arab countries more than doubled. The issue is thus more about social and economic opportunities, than ideology or religion.

and African countries of the Southern hemisphere, establishing a wider ‘Atlantic community’¹⁹. But that is another story.

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¹⁹ Addressing the TTIP issue, the German *Die Welt* argues that “the power of states and alliances is not only about numbers, but also perceptions; a successful deal is one important way to tell the world that the West is alive and ready to shape the global order, and that it stands united in that effort”.

The future of the West

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The rise of an Islamic state, the economic power of China, the renewed action of Moscow toward its neighbors, seem the new, and partially unexpected, results of a new globalizing process begun toward the end of the 20th century with very different perspectives. While democracies appeared to be the winners of the Cold War, authoritarian capitalists, as Michael Ignatieff defines them, are now bound to lead²⁰. But, are they really? The new turns of international relations in the past few years, however, have stirred reflections on the role played by the western powers at the global level. 9/11 engendered a new crisis between Europe and the United States over the most appropriate course of action in countering terrorism. What seemed to be a future led by the West became a blurry present full of resentment and divisions. To an extent, the new emergencies are forcing the EU and the U.S. to take actions that appear once again to move them closer to one another. The Atlantic crises need to be overcome in the common interest and for a stabilization of the world order²¹.

The uncertain prospect of the international order raises the inevitable question: has the leadership of the West waned to the point of no return? This might be the conclusion at a first cursory look at the international scenario these days, but things are a little more complex, and a more in depth historical analysis can help shed more light on the present state of affairs. The role of the United States is likely to remain central while Europe has still some cards to play.

The world orders which emerged and dissolved in the past two centuries can help to understand what is going on today and to reconsider some of the actions that both the United States and a harmonized Europe can undertake.

Let's consider for a moment the concert of nations established at the end of the Napoleonic era and how it lasted a short time, hindered by the national aspirations of a series of peoples that had been sacrificed to the interests of the ancien régime leaders. Europe, however, had experienced some degree of freedom in the period immediately following the French revolution and to an extent during the Napoleonic rule. Different regions had a taste of national independence and virtual republicanism, and Italy was among them. Following that experience, Europe was not pacified until national claims were satisfied. With the consolidation of the nation-state in Europe and in the Americas a new world order was brought about. An order which, while respecting national

²⁰ Michael Ignatieff, "The New World Disorder," *The New York Review of Books*, vol. LXI. n. 14, Sept. 25, 2014, pp. 30-33.

²¹ See: *Le crisi transatlantiche. Continuità e trasformazioni*, Mario Del Pero and Federico Romero eds., Roma, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007.

interests, called for a meaningful degree of globalization. The world market guaranteed the growth and expansion of the new nation-states which were instrumental to one another. If on the one hand, each and everyone claimed an exceptional status (and the U.S. first among others) at the same time they needed one another. Until the political leadership led the way, trying to regulate, to the extent it could, the financial and economic actors, the interplay of the late 19th century stood the adversities of competition and rivalry. For about forty some years peace reigned across the Atlantic, while wars were confined to the periphery. Toward the beginning of the 20th century, however, national interests coupled with hegemonic ambitions, both political and economic, led to a standstill and a substantial break of the existing world order. This led to World War I.

Since then, the United States and Europe have basically defined the geopolitical order. The international order of the Cold War guaranteed a balance that, although precarious, insured a degree of peace, despite the many confrontations in local war theatres, first of all the Asian South East and the Middle East. With the end of the Cold War, came the illusion that the world could be “westernized,” if not Americanized. But it was a brief illusion. 9/11 and its aftermath have raised issues that the West does not seem able to tackle.

The Euro-American order seems seriously threatened for the first time. It’s threatened mainly by the IS which claims to reject the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, it is threatened by China which has become a dominant creditor, it is threatened by Russia and the political and economic instability of former Soviet countries. In such a scenario there is a main question to be asked: what can IS and China offer to the inevitable process of globalization and to what extent are they credible leaders able to seize the helm from the West at this point in history?

Europe and the United States can still make a difference and play a role in the upcoming world order mainly thanks to the combination of political and economic strategies and their ability to use their soft power. It is clear that the post Cold War balance did not work out and was substantially rejected by several national entities, and by independence or religious movements. This is due to two main reasons: an internal crisis of values in the West, that pushed the U.S. and Europe apart, and the conviction of the superiority of the western model. The two obviously represent an irreconcilable contradiction.

First of all, Europe should realize that Putin’s Russia needs a partnership as much as the Union does. Russia cannot expand its influence and regain a major role in international relations without the partnership of countries in which most of its entrepreneurs invest their money, send their children to school and in some cases end up living in. On the other hand, Europe needs to keep a strong partnership with its major ally: the United States. The U.S. is realizing that opposing Russia is not the only way out of the international stalemate. The Western world should remember, as taught by the Cold War and the end of the 19th century that the consolidation of democracies can coexist with authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, which can be at the same time economic

partners. The weakness of the West is in the assumption that its social and political model is the only feasible one in a capitalist market.

For this very reason both Europe and the United States should first of all consolidate their nation-states, their economies and their infrastructure, without expecting to export a model²². Democracy itself is undergoing a crisis in the western world, and Europe and the U.S. need to put their house in order before projecting their still existing economic, and especially, political and idealistic strength on the outside. They should reconsider, in a historical perspective, their relationship with Russia, first, and then with China and the Middle-East. From this point of view the asset Europe and the U.S. have is embedded in their multicultural societies and their economic interdependence, but above all in a set of values that can still play an inspiring role. Rather than pursuing mere financial profits competing separately with the expanding economies of Russia and China, or with the expanding military potential of the Islamic States, they should take advantage of the resources they already have: culture, technology, know how and a political infrastructure that is still functioning, although in need of improvement. For sure, the domestic crises in the West and the presence of a growing number of European born youngsters turned die-hard Islamic fundamentalists, seem to project a gloomy future. But when we look at the actual degree of integration and multiculturalism achieved in several Western countries, it is possible to understand the potential role the West can still play in the geopolitical scenario.

Therefore it is possible to share George Soros' statement that: "Europe needs to be more united, especially in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine. Putin prides himself on being a geopolitical realist. He respects strength and is emboldened by weakness. Yet there is no need to be permanently adversarial. Notwithstanding the current situation in Ukraine, the European Union and Russia are in many ways complementary; they both need each other."²³ Europe therefore has a role to play and not only vis-à-vis Russia. The United States has the capability of using at the same time its hard and soft power; however, "it is the power of attraction—soft power—that ensures the stability of empires. Hard power may be needed for conquest and self-protection, but the hegemon must look after the interests of those who depend on it."²⁴

What can be claimed beyond doubt is that the relatively brief experience of a world rotating around an axis of which the United States is the major constituent is over. We are moving back into a multipolar world, although the United States will remain for long an important factor. Robert Kagan holds that actually the American model is here to stay, at least for another while. The matter, however, is not so much the power the United States can exercise nowadays, but to what extent the American model is or has been successful. Furthermore, if 9/11 represents a watershed and a major

²² Richard Haass, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home: The Case for Putting America's House in Order*, New York, Basic Books, 2014, pp. 161-162.

²³ "The Future of Europe: An Interview with George Soros, George Soros and Gregor Peter Scmitz, *The New York Review of Books*, vol. LXI. n. 7, April 24, 2014, pp. 67-69. p. 68.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

crisis of the “American Promise,” it is not the first time in history that the United States experiences a rough opposition which questions its basic tenets and seems to imperil its stability²⁵. If it is true, as held by Gideon Rachman in his *Zero-Sum Future*, that we are living in an age of anxiety, it is also true that the economic power of China is not coupled by a viable social or cultural model with universal underpinnings²⁶. Being a major competitor and creditor of the West does not make it a leading world model in itself.

From the very beginning, the Federal Republic carried within itself the seeds of a new “Ordo Seclorum” and its antibodies. The new order was established for the freedom and self-rule of some and on the suppression of others in a permanent contradiction that required continuous adjustments in order to pursue an expansion of the benefits of a liberal state. This contradiction has survived to these days and is part and parcel of the Federal government’s actions within and without the continental borders. These contradictions can be detected also in the way the United States confronts the world not just in its foreign policy but in its interaction with other peoples and other nations. The attitudes of other people toward the U.S. vary to extremes, of course, but whatever the approach, they are bound to have an opinion if not a stance about America.

If in the second half of the 20th century, globalization was used as synonymous of Americanization of the world, nowadays such interpretation does not stand in the international arena. Not only the United States seems to have lost its centrality, but also that traditional sense of identity as the cradle of freedom and democracy that, although rejected by many within and without the country, gave Americans a sense of purpose and of historical dynamism. For a long time this feature characterized their way of life, but at the beginning of the new century it seemed to wane. A sense of being under siege replaced self-reliance. It is time for the West to reconsider its position in the world arena in order to understand the actual potentials both Europe and the United States can still employ.

The latter remains a key player in world affairs, while Europe could act as a broker in the role played by the West at the global level. But first of all, the EU has to find once again the core meaning of its existence which the speeding up of the inclusion of new members has partially changed, while globalization has questioned. In the process, Italy can be an important factor thanks to its geopolitical position and its “liminal” role in European strategies. Not a leading economy, but a founder of the Union, Italy should regain the real sense of the foundation of a common European market which placed her in a vantage position in the years of the Cold War when it became a bridge between the West and the Middle East. Geography provides Italy with a benefit: the possibility to be an actor in the dialogue between the West and Islam. Possibly, the EU lost an opportunity when

²⁵ John G. Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 6.

²⁶ Gideon Rachman, *Zero-Sum Future: American Power in an Age of Anxiety*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2011, pp. 171-173.

it did not move effectively following the Arab uprisings and did not find an entente with the United States²⁷.

Any initiative, however, would be impossible without a substantial green light from financial power centers, beginning with the Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank. It is high time that politics regains its lead in international affairs. During and after the Cold War, the effective action of the United States and Europe has traditionally been the result of a synergy between economics and politics. For this reason it is possible to agree with Jan Techau's comments on how Europe did not meet the expectations it created²⁸. In the years following the end of the Cold War, and especially with 9/11 and the financial slump of 2008, the United States and Europe drifted progressively apart without realizing the world had expectations that required immediate answers and especially a coordinated policy. It was mostly an issue concerning economics, but it had to do a lot with political leadership as well. And Europe would have definitely something to say if it could find one authoritative voice. In the delicate phase of the Arab springs, Europe lost the opportunity to play a strategic role as a go-between and an interpreter of south Mediterranean needs and prospects. The policies of the West were not coherent and cogent. Possibly the reason was the absence of a European office capable of formulating a reasonable policy while using strategically the geopolitical advantage of some of its member countries, namely Italy and Spain. Yet, the West would have time to remedy the missteps of the past decade if it understood where its real power actually lies.

While the United States should overcome the syndrome of 9/11, Europe needs to reconsider the reasons why the Union came about and the actual role it can play, first of all in keeping different countries together, and then in accepting, as a union, exchanges and confrontations with other powers. Confronted by a dramatic attack on its territory and bound to respond to a new threat that seemed to be able to shatter the tenets of an American world order, the United States launched into war while at the same time elevating walls around its borders, and not only metaphorically. In turn, this changed entirely the meaning of that basic myth of American identity that is the frontier, which took on the sense it had before American ideologists and exceptionalists reinterpreted what F.J. Turner identified as an "American social development." The frontier is that geographic, and at the same time imaginary, line that contributed to the nation-building process and made mobility and the overcoming of boundaries a trait of the Americans' perception of themselves. The frontier of 21st century America looks once again as a boundary, within which to find shelter from a world that does not look like what Americans imagined only a few decades back.

²⁷ Mario Del Pero, L'ultima delle crisi transatlantiche: l'inizio di una nuova era?" in *Le crisi transatlantiche*, Del Pero-Romero eds., pp.111-132.

²⁸ Jan Techau, *Four Reasons Why European Foreign Policy Sleeps*, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=56976>

The loss of stability, a blurring of identity and a general reconsideration of purpose in American culture, and a critical revision of exceptionalism, are the underlying themes of the recent relationship of the United States with the world²⁹. Along with them, we should also keep in mind the relevance of the interpretive categories of U.S. history: the frontier, a pluralistic society, the conception of the future, the perception, and the relationship with other people and other countries, its definition and application. Only by keeping in mind all these factors and categories can we manage to achieve an understanding of the new role the United States is coming to play at the world level while at the same time appreciating the changing relationship of the country with the rest of the world. Within this context, the relationship with Europe should undergo a redefinition, because only a partnership of purpose and intent can help the West face the capriciousness of the new multipolar world.

By looking at western history, it is possible to realize how the detonating factors that brought to the post-9/11 crisis were already in place before then, as far back as the loss of status and of self-reliance Americans experienced in the 1970s through the final phase of the Vietnam War, the oil crisis, and the Watergate³⁰. Since then, Americans have struggled with their attempt at re-establishing a centrality they sensed they were losing. But what they had started to lose, actually, was their trust in their form of government, the possibility of the final achievement of “the American dream.” The projection into the future and the ultimate overcoming of the frontier, was giving way to a sense of stalemate and isolation.

The U.S. has always been part of a world wide web which becomes even more meaningful today because of the social networks. Created and developed at first in the United States, they are not necessarily dependent on one center. The very structure of the www is itself an exercise at skipping possible interruptions of a system that does not rely on one single main source but is meant to develop across frontiers. This enables new generations to redefine their concept of the future, and the future role of their country. From this point of view, Europe can even be at an advantage, thanks to its geographic position. South and East, Europe deals with a world that is undergoing major changes and appears to be threatening. Yet, as already stated, Russia needs Europe as much as Europe needs partners rich in raw materials and new financial assets. True, many of these countries are not democracies, but Europe itself is experiencing a crisis in democracy that would recommend not to insist too much on political and ideological issues. In order to be credible at the international level, both Europe and the United States need to think over their democratic construction and their domestic social and economic stability. Once these will be regained the soft power of the West will recover credibility.

²⁹ Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History*. New York: Hill & Wang, 2006; George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relation Since 1776*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

³⁰ Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, pp. 810-811.

In a definition of the “American idea” in “The Atlantic” special issue for its 150th anniversary, historian Alan Brinkley stated: “America’s self-image is more deeply bound up with a sense of having a special place in history than most other nations’ are³¹.” This has caused the United States to often move off track, in its contention to have a mission in the world. That messianic call Americans have often felt in history, on several occasions resulted in actions that changed altogether the meaning of mission itself. Because of its growing prominence in the 20th century and its new search for markets along with an expanding economy, many leaders in the United States ended up stretching the sense of mission: from the “act of sending” someone to carry a credo or an ideal over to other people, to a military intervention that can in the end force others into accepting one’s own system of life. But this was the consequence also of a first major redefinition of the “American way of life” that occurred in the late 19th century as the country industrialized massively, but especially in the 1890s with the closing of the frontier.

What seemed an ever expanding mental and physical projection had come to an end. On that very year, Frederick J. Turner enunciated his thesis which, while establishing an exceptional course of history for the United States, at the same time froze the concept of the frontier into a past that albeit mythical was destined to go. But the very force of that American ideal could inform the future course of history. This is when a “*traslatio imperii*” took place permitting the country to overcome the internal crisis of a model while at the same time exporting it. As it is well known, the sense of mission intrinsic in American history has taken up different forms: Woodrow Wilson stated that the American ideals were universal ideals and it was the United States’ duty to enable other countries to pursue their own liberty the American way. Franklin Roosevelt claimed the principle of the four freedoms, which were as much American as universal. And George W. Bush brought that idea to its ultimate consequence turning it upside down: what the attackers of the U.S. most hated is American freedom.

Amy Gutman has probably best summarized what the actual American mission could be nowadays: “Leaving the fate of our democracy in the hands of a diverse and constantly changing American citizenry that is guided by constitutional democratic principles is perhaps the most enduring American idea of all. That is why protecting individual freedom and cultivating a highly educated citizenry is our society’s utmost responsibility. This dual mission—recognized from our founding but far, far from realized to the present day—has never been more important than in these perilous times. We the People will determine whether—and which—future Americans have more or less opportunity to enjoy the fruits of our great constitutional freedoms³².” From this perspective,

³¹ Alan Brinkley, *Messiah Complex, The American Idea*, Scholars, novelists, politicians, artists, and others look ahead to the future of the American idea. “The Atlantic”, 2007, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/11/the-american-idea/6346/>

³² Amy Gutman, *A Dual Mission, The American Idea*, Scholars, novelists, politicians, artists, and others look ahead to the future of the American idea. “The Atlantic”, 2007, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/11/the-american-idea/6346/>

Europe has a similar potential. As stated at the beginning, the West retains a soft power which represents its only true strength worldwide in hazardous times.

The West should then come out of the dichotomy “Us-Them,” where them stands for the rest of the world, and redefine its place without elevating barriers. As Gutman states, the true asset is inclusion and not exclusion. Europe and the United States may not be anymore the leading economies, but they have indeed a social and cultural patrimony that still plays a role. The solutions to the many world crises are not only economic. Culture and human values may not increase the gross national product but do enrich people and their purpose in life.

The American century lasted a little more than a full hundred years. If we take as a starting point 1898, when the country projected its expansion overseas after the conquest of the frontier, it is possible to trace that expansion up to the early 21st century following the Clinton administration’s several interventions in different war theaters around the world. Once again the United States assumed its action to be essential for the support of shared liberal values, no matter what the cost. It was a “benevolent” expansion of the influence of the United States that in the end failed. But the first cracks in the structure were detectable since the 1970s when the power of the country within its “sphere of influence” began vacillating. But a major turn came with the end of the Cold War and the subsequent ten years that impressed commentators as the completion of American world power. Ironically, in the process of reconsidering its sphere of influence, which seemed to be expanding, the United States did not realize that it was instead imploding. The new challenge in the end came from not so clear an enemy, Islamic fundamentalism, but signs of its ascendancy were visible already since the 1970s.

Terrorism shows in its entirety the essence of human vulnerability because unleashes a violence that is out of control and does not come from a clear source. There is no “evil empire” responsible for it and this violence seems to be the result of an outrage hard to identify and contain³³. The millenarian predictions of an American world order and the ideology of Manifest Destiny are not useful tools of interpretation anymore. If in the 19th and early 20th century it was the destiny of the United States to spread over the continent and even overseas, carrying the torch of civilization, at the beginning of the 21st, America is bound to retreat because it has not fulfilled the promise of its destiny. All these factors contribute to draw the picture of a country undergoing a deep crisis while trying to stick firmly to the old tenets of its self-definition.

On the other hand, Europe should abandon the conviction of being the only true interpreter of human values and of peaceful coexistence. Until the EU overcomes its present divisions and troubles, definitely it cannot expect other peoples to follow its example.

Only with the increasing immigration and globalization, and the final detonator of 9/11, did Americans of the old generations realize the American dream as they had conceived of it, was not

³³ Judith Butler, *Violenza, lutto, politica*, in *Undici settembre. Contro-narrazioni americane*, Daniela Daniele ed. Torino: Einaudi, 2003, pp. 49-59, p. 55.

practicable anymore. Because of all the changes occurred within the country and in the world around it in the meantime, that ideal was changing into something else, which is probably much more inclusive than what Americans had thought of until then. If the United States had influenced the world, the world had taken over the American dream creating a loop that unmade once and for all exceptionalism as a category to understand the United States. When moving to the United States, the immigrant usually makes the American dream his/her own, but at the same time contributes to the redefinition of that dream. The Americanization of the world brings eventually the “worldization” of the United States, and it cannot be otherwise: the “American dream” is a human dream. Only this way, the United States remains a point of reference for the generations coming of age in the 21st century.

The solution to the many problems now facing the world and the role of the West is probably in the hands of the younger generations for whom the Cold War is history and 9/11 a memory of infancy or at most of adolescence. For them the American dream is not what it used to be until the 1980s, nor is the Iron Curtain or the wall dividing the Mexican border. The divisions of old still existing, can be easily overcome by the World Wide Web. Identity is shaped not only by national appurtenance, or political strife, but is defined also by the social networks and worldwide interlocutors. Tahrir Square is thus connected to Washington Square, and the latter to Hong Kong Island, and, although the issues may seem very different, they are indicators of a general change of perspective induced by a transition of the world order and by a technology developed, however, in the United States but now shared globally.

The future of the West, as it should be, is therefore as much in the hands of a new generation now coming of age as it has been in those of the youth of the sixties. The risk of yet another isolationist pull should thus be avoided. It's not by walling themselves in that Europe and the United States will find a solution or regain a leading role.

If the American century closed in 2001, its effects will be felt still for another long while and not just for economic reasons but for the values and the cultural changes it brought about. The West should come to terms with the idea that we live in a new reality that is not necessarily shaped only by the West but that remains heavily influenced by its founding values, both European and American. Once the West accepts this reality and the idea that it is not out on a mission, then it will regain momentum and meaning. Cutting across frontiers can actually start at home and enable Europe and the United States to see the actual potential of their cultural and value systems. Multicultural societies, such as those of the United States and Europe, require a continuous exercise in balance and respect but can represent an excellent training ground for international relations. The new role the West can play at the world level begins at home.

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The Italian soft power: the three-dimensions of power

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The issue of power is central in any policy discussion. Since for ever we can find, in fact, that philosophical discussions have focused their attention on the ability of individuals to act, on their potential capacity to defend themselves as a community, to produce wealth or culture.

In ancient times, we find the first great contribution to the question in Plato “The Dialogues” and Aristotle “Politic”. Despite the different ways of thinking, both Philosopher are concentrated around the binomial “power – law”.

At the beginning of “The Republic” Plato tackles through Socrates’ words the mouth of the subtle challenge of Thrasymachus who said precisely that “power is nothing more than the power, the right of the strongest”. Furthermore, the final experience of Socrates’ life, which culminated with the death of the master, has led Plato to elevate above the factual aspects of the exercise of power idea of right, justice, the law empire.

The Perfect City is where reason prevails, that is, City in which each class of citizens occupies the place that really belongs to it, according to their social status.

The size of the power is not yet removed. It came rather as a background in which rational organization of social life is possible. Aristotle, moving from a more practical point of view and, in many ways, even in opposition to Plato, continues to examine the Power as a “basic premise”, as a specific object, for consideration on society. For Aristotle the real problem is first of all “the natural community”, what really comes out of reality. This community is divided into two general premises: man is a rational animal, man is a political animal. These two features distinguish the value that social relations has, as a prerequisite for everybody survival. Because, in short, no one is able to live as isolated self-sufficient entity, it is clear that everybody different attitudes bring citizens to join, in family to propagate life, in State to allow a good life.

In Aristotle legitimacy of power as a force has validity, then, within the proper relationships between citizens, based on natural law.

The dynamics of power have become, later, during the Middle Ages and modernity, characters more and more institutionals, related, therefor, to the principle that legitimate exercise of force has value only within a general framework supported from the idea of sovereignty, that is the supreme authority (spiritual or material) and in continuing respect of natural laws, or rather of that conditions of order that social life has in function of what the human-being is. With Christianity, as well explained Joseph Ratzinger, the novelty of Incarnation has given to Church a supreme power, even if circumscribed, able to limit and order States political power.

In modern times, however, the old original dimension of power as force has re-emerged in an explosive way, as individuals real power to generate institutional organizations (“The general will” of Jean Jacques Rousseau) or as the specific reason of authority to restrain coercively the original state of conflict (“The Leviathan” of Thomas Hobbes).

With these two major contributions, we gradually come to the political balance between people's will, namely power as force and strength, and the legality in its operations, and constitutionality, that characterizes today's Western democracies.

The essence of this approach is given by the complex relationship that exists between natural law, which unites men together in society, and the expression of mutual freedom, individual and collective, which allows citizens to realize on their own.

Into the extreme dichotomy between freedom and dictatorship is consumed, not surprisingly, the world division into block during the Cold War, after the tragic chapter of the great totalitarian regimes.

And today?

Now we are seeing a substantial modification of political relations, mainly as a result of two general reasons. On the one hand the decline of National State, conceived in the terms in which it is designed and built in modern times. This did not coincide with the end of national policy but with the blurring of territorial and popular autonomy of the states. On the other hand the grow of international dimension of social relations, that is, the set of all the elements of the transnational economy that are grouped under the term “globalization”.

This state of affairs, deteriorated dramatically after the end of the rigid schedule of the great ideologies, has emerged as “overall paradigm” in the new millennium.

In this complex scenario fits a new reflection on the ancient problem of Jus Publicum Europeum, namely on man ability to determine rationally with his actions Society. Even after the failure of European Convention, which had the task of designing the architecture of what was supposed to be the new constitution of the Old Continent, now we are seeing, especially after the last European elections, to a sharp clash between the material realities of the people, present in every Union Country, and institutional organizations, who, in the name of their own authority recognized by different Treaties, have the task to govern the common policy: commission, parliament, council, central bank.

The old Plato’s problem, namely the conflict between “power as strength” and “power as authority” is offered as part of a complex relationship between individuals, nations, states, EU institutions. On one hand is facing the right and the meaningfulness of a strengthening by Authority of Govern in the Continent, on the other hand nationalism and anti-European ideas explode in the East new countries member.

At this point we have to ask is it possible a political thought true definition and, above all, is it possible to expand the influence of democracy through other kind of power, such as culture or religion?

To answer, we may move the argument from a writing of an American political scientist Steven Lukes wrote in 2005.

He, taking a conference wrote in 1974, presented an articulated conception of power, which is spread across three specific dimensions.

His reflection is not important for the conclusions he reaches, but for the starting point and for the pursued method. The reference to the three dimensions of power will allow us to understand not just the individualist base who inspires contemporary politics, but also the role that soft power can take to broaden the cultural horizons.

Lukes proceeds with a circular argumentation based on the idea that individual is an acting subject and a leading actor of social action. He first deal with the mechanical conception of democracy, given by the philosopher Robert Dhal. The statement of what an individual is appears as soon as one consider the power in its operative dimension. The formula of the first dimension of power is the following: “B” does not act what he would act if “a” does not act.

Only the individual subjects are those who make actions of influence, because to exist are only individual subjects, as defined by Aristotle “first substances”. Community, in this logic, are the sum of individual actions.

Emerges in this way the first dimension of power, namely the recognition of the primordial central role of the person as a singularity. Giorgio La Pira, explaining this traditional anthropological conception, revealed well as the Latin Christian humanism is based on centrality of man, conceived himself as subject and purpose of the politics.

Today, of course, ended the great collective utopias; the first dimension of power appear insufficient, because of it weakened the community bond and the society link. If we consider only the individual, we remain closed in a democratic relative vision without respect for minorities. How is it possible share the “common good” if individual is the only absolute value?

Exactly for this reason, Pope John Paul II in Centesimus Annus in 1991 attacked individualism, dominant in the world after the end of totalitarian systems.

Lukes, in a similar way, noted that exist a second dimension of power that consist in to capacity to act beyond the exclusive limits, material and singular, of individual operation.

When, for example, some subjects are able to dictate the arguments agenda excluding some issues by the public media, this kind of power is much more incisive and effective than the last.

This second sphere of action moves so hidden, creating the conditions to exclude or attach individual and collective powers. Just thinking about the labor union’s power or the exclusion of certain ethical issues about civil rights, to fully understand the relevance of this indirect influence of

this second power, not based on causal effectiveness of individuals, but on social influence of public opinion.

Lukes' thinking considers, however, a "third dimension of power" too, that incorporates by integrating in a direct way previous both dimensions. However, direct and indirect action move on the same level. Proceeding, in fact, following the sheer force of individual influence you can't exit from the first dimension of power.

As Jurgen Habermas explained, acting and influencing are a unique approach focused on the subjectivity agent, who attend to the communicative will. The internal relationships of a society are represented by flows of information and conflicting actions already decided by interests who choose to influence in a predetermined direction.

As Aristotle says in "Metaphysics" about Protagoras, nothing escapes to relativism. Indeed, the passage from the first dimension to the second dimension is the growth of a model always equal to itself. In this, twentieth-century dictatorships provide us with a clear example. Where a group of power takes possession of means of persuasion, and produces a policy of generally influence, it will widen the risks for minorities freedom of for the real survival of a really common freedom.

The words of a great Homily written by Joseph Ratzinger, who, speaking of political power, noted that if does not reveal limitations to the expansion of power, the State becomes an absolute power that doesn't admits and doesn't acknowledges religious and cultural strengths. People are often been subject to dictatorships, when just these two dimensions of power realize. The persecutions suffered by Christian Churches in the world, even for strong ideological campaigns, is an example that explains the dangers of relativism.

There may be a way out from this political model?

Lukes suggests a possible solution when it introduces the "third dimension of power", the one that Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault described as "the power of resistance to dominion". This new dimension of power goes in an opposite direction than the previous two.

It's necessary to change the political subject. Jacques Maritain said that "difference is individual and person". Everything is singular, but the singularity of the human being is different. As part of human nature, every person is linked to others.

The authentically human dimension to live the its own peculiarity does not allow to match human being to a mere individual. Every man and every woman is a whole who is expressed by its uniqueness, able to develop its freedom and its common aim only sharing them with others.

The third dimension of power coincides precisely with this "community-oriented person", which coincides with life's political value in society. In this sense, Alain de Benoist talked about a shift from an individual to a person. Modern philosophy, in the name of an emphasis for finding an each individual unique subjectivity, stripped every citizen from each link, each community, considering citizen an isolated subject, neutral and devoid of any social quality.

The failure of contemporary relativism is that it dominates only the two dimensions of power and lacks the communitarian idea of a human being and there is no reference to common good.

The human being is a “person”. And the person is both personal and communitarian. This means that every person living in communities that come together naturally, starting from family, the basic cell, the to Nation.

Man lives in a society as a whole, which discovers and learns to live their singularity in family affection relationships and in social relations of friendship.

The political consequences of this reasoning are important. The third dimension of power represents the religious and cultural traditions of each specific social tradition. The culture of a community is the way in which people express their own needs, their own needs through social associations.

For this reason, the growth of the cultural influence coincides with the strength increasing of freedom that every citizen expresses in the construction of common good, needs and through social associations.

As explained by De Benoist, at the end, in an individual context justice becomes the maximum value; in a communitarian context, however, common good becomes the maximum value. Values have precedence over individual justice, allowing the economic expansion of personal freedom.

The third dimension of power, ultimately, is the religious, artistic and national culture of a people. More these values grow, more people are able to defend against malicious interests, from financial monopolies and actions that destroy freedoms.

The real political alternative to relativism is not collectivize interest, but use socially relevant interests for a common good that is the cultural value of the same community.

The Atlantic dimension represents the soft power of Europe in the sense explained. It is a third dimension of power, a shared mindset, a condition of truth, which, as explained Renan, results in consensus cannot be manipulated because it already exists in the social basis of individual states.

The West Atlantic is, therefore, our soft power, the positive common power who guides everybody in the exercise of their own political choices. When these communitarian sphere of influence doesn't exist, the individual is weak prey of own interest, suffering and not building democracy.

So Roger Scruton is quite right when he says that without being in Atlantic membership, and without the presence of a soft power-sensitive and widespread, it is very unlikely that there is a complete democracy, made real and solid.

Democracy, in fact, require the existence of communities made up of community, society made up of the company, personally of individuals who are in a position to share in themselves the culture they belong to. Europe without the United States is deprived of its soft power. The United States only with Europe and made the third dimension of power that is identified with a genuine democratic culture. Where, in fact, dominate only individual interests, develops a form of apparent liberalism and never truly democratic affirmation of the common good.

Therefore, the most important goal today is to protect the freedom of all, the development of small cells Community, first family, and forms of association prior to the policy, such as those of a religious nature and culture. And it is important not to separate these values to be a strong relationship between Europe and the United States.

The expansion of democracy depends on the policy of the States, because freedom cannot be derived solely from the state. You need an international culture. In a context where the boundaries are weak, in which it occurs multiculturalism, it is important that the common good is an expression of human culture and western Atlantic strong and present.

Without a common culture cannot live together. Without the West Atlantic lacks the democratic culture in the world. This sharing of granite of our identity is the only way to generate policies for the reception, to integrate the different EU actors in a great global civilization.

The soft power of culture is the expression of a common feeling, is cultural synthesis that embraces and includes a rational individual individuality. The environmental protection and individual rights cannot exist without national cultural identity and west of the Atlantic world.

The Christian roots, of course, remain in the background, being the soul of our way of life. Christianity is a culture and not just a personal belief. Christianity is the soft power of the Western tradition from which the roots of our democracy.

And the rediscovery of what we certainly cannot help but to start from what binds us together and keeps us together as a people as part of a tradition that the European Community is, as explained Ratzinger, daughter of Rome, Athens and Jerusalem .

Moreover, even from the economic point of view it is impossible today, with a crisis that surrounds us for twenty years and with a demographic deficit so massive, that Italy could rise by relying solely to their weak forces. On the other hand, the risk of losing their political identity, losing its economic identity, it is very obvious.

The attraction of the foreign funding goes resolutely through the enhancement of our cultural soft power. A country that has awareness of himself, that subjectivity has a strong community and protecting their own customs and their own ideas, it is also able to make good use of their economic resources.

The third dimension of power is to Italy the first dimension, the most important of all. The whole world looks at our regions, our food, our fashion, our way of life, our tradition as a resource and an invaluable asset. For Italy this cultural heritage is the engine of its economy, a spiritual resource that requires an adequate economic investment, education and culture.

To know one is to understand themselves as a community that saves the common good and their own identity, that awareness of one's present and its past. Without this awareness, there is no future for either Europe or the United States.

Short Biography (alphabetic order)

Daniele FIORENTINO

Daniele Fiorentino teaches U.S. History at the University of Roma Tre and he is coordinator of international relations in the Department of Political Science. A Fulbright student and scholar, after a Ph.D. in the United States and a Dottorato at the University of Rome La Sapienza, Dr. Fiorentino became Senior Cultural Advisor at the American Embassy in Italy and later Director of the Center of American Studies in Rome (1995-2002). In 2002, he opened and then directed the Rome's branch of the Institute for International Education of Students (IES). He taught for several years at the University of Macerata. A specialist on the history of the late 19th and early 20th century, he has written extensively on American Indian history and culture. In the past ten years Dr. Fiorentino has dedicated his research to U.S.-Italian relations and to cultural relations in the U.S. in the 20th century. More recently he has published several essays on the "crisis of the American order." Among his many publications in both fields: *Gli Stati Uniti e il Risorgimento d'Italia, 1848-1901 (The United States and the Italian Risorgimento, 1848-1901)*, Roma: Gangemi, 2013. *Non è un paese per vecchi: identità, paura e futuro nella cultura statunitense contemporanea, in Oltre il secolo americano: gli Stati Uniti prima e dopo l'11 settembre*, a cura di R. Baritono e E. Vezzosi Baritono e E. Vezzosi, Roma, Carocci, 2011; *L'assimilazione degli Indiani negli Stati Uniti d'America (Tribes must disappear: the policy of assimilation of American Indians in the United States)* Rome: Carocci, 2001.

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Columnist to many newspapers (Il Foglio, Il Tempo, Formiche, Italia Oggi, Avvenire, Vita e Pensiero), Benedetto Ippolito is Professor of Philosophy at the Roma Tre University and the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

Ippolito was Board member and Chairman of the Scientific Committee of the "Fondazione Telecom Italia" from 2008 to 2011. He is also Director of Strategic IPALMO (Istituto per le relazioni internazionali tra l'Italia e i Paesi dell'Africa, America Latina, Medio ed Estremo Oriente); Executive Director of the CISEM (Interdepartmental Centre Studies in the field of Military Ethics); Consultant staff for the ethical, political and social prof. Joaquin Navarro-Valls, University Campus Bio-Medico of Rome; Head Management and organization of the training course on the leadership ACAF, President Ettore Bernabei; and Member of the Scientific Committee of the Magna Carta Foundation, President sen. Gaetano Quagliariello.

Guido LENZI

Ambassador (ret). Born in 1941; graduated in law at the University of Florence; joined the Foreign Service in 1964. Was posted in Algiers, Lausanne, London and Moscow, before serving for over twenty years in a series of multilateral diplomatic assignments: as head of the NATO Desk at the Foreign Ministry, Minister Counsellor at the Italian Mission to the UN, Director of the WEU (now EU) Institute for Security Studies in Paris, and finally Permanent Representative to the OSCE in Vienna. He was also Diplomatic Advisor to the Minister of Defence, Deputy Chief of Cabinet to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of the Senate, and Diplomatic Advisor to two successive Ministers of Interior.

After retiring, he has published extensively in foreign policy magazines. He has held the chair of International Relations at the University of Valle d'Aosta, and presently teaches "Diplomatic practice" at the University of Bologna. He has edited two books of diplomatic memoirs and just published an extended essay, "Internazionalismo Liberale: attori e scenari del mondo globale".