

Preparing For EU Collapse

If there is one thing the Spain vs Catalonia conflict reminds us of, it has got to be Turkey. And that is a much bigger problem for the EU than it realizes. First of all, Brussels can no longer insist that this is an internal, domestic, Spanish issue, since Catalan president Puidgemont is in...Brussels. So are 4 members of his government.

That moves decisions to be made about his situation from the Spanish legal system to its Belgian counterpart. And the two are not identical twins. Even if both countries are EU members. This may expose a very large European problem: the lack of equality among justice systems. Citizens of EU member countries are free to move and work across the Union, but they are subject to different laws and constitutions.

The way the Spanish government tries to go after Puidgemont is exactly the same as the way Turkish president Erdogan tries to get to his perceived archenemy, Fethullah Gülen, a longtime resident of Pennsylvania. But the US doesn't want to extradite Gülen, not even now Turkey arrests US embassy personnel. The Americans have had enough of Erdogan.

Erdogan accuses Gülen of organizing a coup. Spanish PM Rajoy accuses the Catalan government of the same. But they are not the same kind of coup. The Turkish one saw violence and death. The Spanish one did not, at least not from the side of those who allegedly perpetrated the coup.

Brussels should have intervened in the Catalonia mess a long time ago, called a meeting, instead of claiming this had nothing to do with the EU, a claim as cowardly as it is cheap. You're either a union or you're not. And if you are, the well-being of all your citizens is your responsibility. You don't get to cherry pick. You got to walk your talk.

Belgian news paper De Standaard today makes an interesting distinction. It says the Belgian judicial system is not asked to "extradite" Puidgemont to Spain (uitlevering), but to "surrender" him (overlevering). Legal gibberish.

The paper also states that the case will go through three different courts, each of which has 15 days to announce a decision, so Puidgemont is safe for at least a

month and a half. And then on December 21, Rajoy had called elections in Catalonia. For which, reportedly, he will seek to ban several parties. Don't be surprised if that includes Puidgemont's.

Moreover, even if the democratically elected president of Catalonia loses all appeals available to him, he could then ask for asylum in Belgium (apparently, Belgium is the only EU member country in which EU citizens can ask for asylum). And then you would really get into a mix-up of EU versus Belgian versus Spanish laws. In a way this is good, it would test a system that is not prepared at all for such divergences.

But what a disaster this is, once more, for the EU. It has shown zero leadership in the case, neither from the likes of European Commission head Juncker nor from Angela Merkel, its most powerful head of state. How can one not conclude that the Union is completely rudderless? This is just as bad as the refugee crisis, and the beheading of the Greek economy.

Threatening people with 30-year jail terms for organizing a peaceful vote is not what the EU should stand for. And now that it does, it threatens its own survival. Europe cannot be the land of Erdogan or Franco, it cannot look the other way and live.

That may be why the German armed forces, the Bundeswehr, have prepared a report that looks at future scenarios for Europe, including worst-case ones. The article in Der Spiegel is in German only, and my command of the language is a tad rusty, but the translation through Google is surprisingly accurate, I only had to change a few words.

The authors don't seek the worst case option in either Spain or Greece, but perhaps they should. Then again, some of their projections are stark enough to offer plenty food for thought.

Military planners think EU collapse is conceivable

According to SPIEGEL information, the Bundeswehr played through social and political trends until 2040 for the first time. Strategists are also developing a worst-case scenario. The Bundeswehr believes that an end to the West in its current form over the next few decades is possible. This is according to information from Der Spiegel from the "Strategic Perspective 2040", which was

adopted at the end of February by the top of the Ministry of Defense and since then kept under wraps.

For the first time in its history, the Bundeswehr's 102-page document shows how social trends and international conflicts could influence German security policy in the coming decades. The study sets the framework in which the Bundeswehr of the future is likely to move.

The paper does not yet provide any concrete conclusions for equipment and strength. In one of the six scenarios ("The EU in Disintegration and Germany in Reactive Mode"), the authors assume a "multiple confrontation". The future projection describes a world in which the international order erodes after "decades of instability", value systems worldwide diverge and globalization is stopped.

"The EU enlargement has been largely abandoned, other states have left the community, Europe has lost its global competitiveness," write the Bundeswehr strategists: "The increasingly disorderly, sometimes chaotic and conflict-prone world has dramatically changed the security environment of Germany and Europe." In the fifth scenario ("West against East"), some eastern EU countries are freezing the state of European integration while others have "joined the Eastern bloc".

In the fourth scenario ("multipolar competition"), extremism is on the rise and there are EU partners who "even occasionally seem to seek a specific approach to Russia's" state capitalist model ". The document expressly makes no prognosis, but all scenarios are "plausible with the 2040 time horizon," write the authors. The simulations were developed by scientists of the Federal Armed Forces Planning Office.

Funny, that 'future projection' looks a lot like how I see the EU today, not in 2040.

There's a longer article behind a paywall at Der Spiegel, but this should be sufficient to get a conversation going. Angela Merkel may be all EU all the time, just like all her EU peers, but her own army has serious questions about that. And given the Catalonia swamp, who could doubt that they are right about having doubts?

Yanis Varoufakis' DiEM25 movement is all set towards democratizing the EU, but

how realistic is that goal? How divergent does a Union have to get before you give up on it? Poland, Hungary, Czechia all want completely different things from what Holland and Germany want. New French president Macron is finding out as we speak that he can only do what Merkel allows him to.

And then along comes Spain and tries to inflict Franco era laws and violence on its citizens. But Brussels does nothing, and neither does Berlin. Refugees can rot away on Greek islands if eastern Europe doesn't want them, and Catalan grandmas can get beaten to a pulp by the remnants of Franco's troops, Brussels has zilch.

The way the EU functions today is no accident, and it's not some new development. Present-day Brussels is the culmination of 50-60 years of institutionalization. You don't change that with an election here or there.

Will Catalonia be the endgame of Brussels? Will it be the refugee crisis? Brexit? It's impossible to say, but what is certain is that in its present state, the Union has no future. And at the same time, there's no solution in sight. The powers that be are deeply invested, and they're not going to let go just because some country, or part of a country, or political party, or group of voters wants them to.

The EU is profoundly anti-democratic, and it intends to stay that way. But imagine that Belgium 'surrenders' Puidgemont, a man whose movement has lifted anti-violence to a whole new and modern level, and Rajoy jails him for 30 years, and the next day sits in on some meeting in Brussels, what picture does that paint for the 500 million EU citizens?

They're crazy if they think they can get away with this.

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