



Europe:

Difficulties Within,
Threats From Without

2015



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*cover includes image originally from United States Central Intelligence Agency's The World Factbook.

Europe: Difficulties Within, Threats From Without

Patrick Murphy

Europe is once again looming large on the world stage. Internally there are a number of difficulties to deal with. For the European Union, economic realities press for greater unification; political and financial issues (read: euro and Greece) seem to push in the opposite direction. Russia, its populated areas mostly European, is flexing its muscles. Germany is again the greatest power wholly within the boundaries of Europe, but what can or should its role be, given its past? Externally, millions of Muslims have moved to Europe over the past fifty years--and there is furthermore a refugee crisis in Europe as we speak. There is also an “ISIS-crisis,” partly in Europe and partly for Europeans if they are abroad, e.g., as in Tunisia recently.

The Status of Europe Today

European integration still pulls on the imaginations of many. The European Union includes most of both the population and area of non-Russian Europe. The euro, the “European” currency, has somewhat more limited coverage. But there are countervailing anti-integrationist forces. So-called “Eurocratic” rules from Brussels exasperate Europeans, and do not seem democratically legitimated. Intra-EU border controls may also be re-introduced in the wake of the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris.

And the euro as the de facto “European” currency has been undermined by the imbalance among the euro economies. Even a partial euro breakup would both exemplify and contribute to European disintegration. Ireland and the Mediterranean and Latin countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece have had to endure austerity to get their finances under control. It would

seem that some countries are gradually getting “over the hump”—not including Greece, of which more below.

The European Union; its Great-Power Members: Germany, France, and the United Kingdom; and its Current Conundrum with Greece

Germany is the most important country wholly within Europe, the largest in terms of its population and economy. But because of its history, both Germans and non-Germans have doubts about Germany’s playing a political role commensurate with its economic position. The fact that Germany’s popular and successful leader is a dowdy East German housewife—and physicist—probably is a strong plus in terms of allaying fears about German predominance in Europe.

Regarding economic issues, Germany is pressuring EU states to get their financial houses in order. Most gradually are. But there is the extreme example of Greece. For the record, Greece’s foreign debt is \$360 billion, or about \$47,636 per capita and 174 percent of its GDP. In the referendum of July 5 called for by Prime Minister Tsipras, Greece voted strongly against further austerity imposed from outside. But over the next couple of weeks, with that very same prime minister taking the lead, the Greek parliament passed two sets of austerity measures much more severe than the ones its voters had rejected in early July.

These reforms set the stage for a possible final agreement for a three-year bailout—Athens’s third in five years—worth as much as \$96 billion. The likely reason why Prime Minister Tsipras reversed himself to a pro-“European” position, in opposition to many of his own party members, is that he really does not want Greece to leave the euro zone. But it will likely be August 20 at

the earliest before final decisions are made. The short version might be that Greece and its euro creditors are once again kicking the can down the road, but with the Greeks having very reluctantly accepted two more rounds of tough austerity measures.

For the sake of speculation, we might ask ourselves, “What if Greece did default on a payment due in the near future, withdrew from the euro zone, and re-introduced the old Greek currency, the drachma, as a way of gaining control of its economy?” Joining the euro was supposed to be an irreversible step toward a United Europe, but on the practical level “euro-withdrawal” might be the best solution for Greece. By withdrawing from the euro zone, Greece might become more economically successful—and thus set what amounts to an “anti-euro” example for countries like Portugal and Italy, or even the United Kingdom. Might Greece voluntarily or otherwise withdraw all together from the European Community? There is the important psychological aspect as well: the very word “Europe” was invented by the ancient Greeks, and “Europe” without Greece is hard to imagine. Many commentators are saying that how the Greek situation is handled will be a make-or-break moment, not only for the euro zone but for the overall European Community itself.

As for Europe’s other leading powers, both the United Kingdom and France seem to have withdrawn somewhat from the international stage in recent years. British policy toward the European Union has always been ambiguous. Britain is the only major country in the EU not to have adopted the euro, and Prime Minister Cameron has promised a referendum for 2017 on the UK’s continued membership in the EU, before which he hopes to extract some rather unclear concessions from the EU. While possibly loosening its outside political ties to the EU, the UK is

also experiencing signs of fraying internal ties, such as the idea of Scottish independence. A referendum on independence lost last year, but Scottish nationalism is very much alive.

Russia

Russia is once again a problem for the rest of Europe. What are the long-range plans of Russian President Vladimir Putin? Does even he himself know, besides wanting much greater control of Russia's "near abroad" and recognition of Russia as a great power?

Putin has been waging what has been dubbed "hybrid warfare" in his "near abroad," including Ukraine but also the Baltic lands and even in some ways in the U.S. Hybrid warfare includes outside- (in this case, Russian) supported domestic rebel forces, outside military with insignia removed ("little green Russian men"), and large doses of propaganda, which regularly reach the U.S. as email threads after articles about, say Ukraine—Russia-friendly, and possibly Russian-paid trolls. At times the Ukrainian conflict seems "frozen," as nothing much happens for perhaps months, and then real warfare again breaks out. With "Europe" distracted by the Greek-euro crisis, there was the possibility that Putin might decide to heat things up again in Ukraine. There is also the separate issue of cyberattacks by Russian and Chinese hackers on U.S. governmental and economic entities.

Russia's aggression in Ukraine has awakened Europe and the United States. But is the West's reaction, such as economic sanctions, equal to the Russian threat? We (Europe and the U.S.) always seem to add new sanctions after the fact, rather than stepping them up ahead of further

Putinesque aggression. In late 2014 financial sanctions seemed to begin to affect Russia's behavior, but the collapse of oil prices was probably more important.

The Russian economy, with its extreme dependence on oil, has greatly suffered during Putin's adventurism in Ukraine. Ironically, Russia is now making overtures to Greece as another European "odd man out," but does not seem to have offered Greece any actual financial support. How long will the Russian people accept the decline in their living standard? Or the idea of body bags coming home from Ukraine? Will the West be willing to continue sanctions, and will it finally supply lethal weapons to Ukraine?

Finally, what if Putin moves on a NATO country (Ukraine is not a member of NATO)? Little thought seems to have been given by anyone as to how such a conflict would develop, including possible escalation to the nuclear level, though fear of nuclear escalation was exactly what kept the peace from the late 1940s to 1989. Is anyone "thinking the unthinkable?"

Muslim Terrorism and Growing Refugee Tides

In January France suffered Islamic attacks in Paris, and, along with other countries, immediately rounded up dozens of suspected Muslim terrorists. As recently as June 26, Muslim terrorists undertook attacks in Tunisia, France, and Kuwait. The Tunisia attack, for which ISIS claimed responsibility, killed at least 38 people at a seaside resort, mostly of British, German, or other European backgrounds: Europeans are under attack outside of Europe as well as at home. And Tunisia is very concerned about the effect of such attacks on its tourist trade, something of which ISIS, of course, is fully aware.

Britain has huge numbers of immigrant and second-generation Muslims from the Commonwealth, France many from Algeria and North Africa, and Germany many more from Turkey. Large numbers of Muslims in Europe suffer from relative poverty and lack of social integration. All this encourages the growth of anti-Western attitudes and now Islamic terror. Of course, probably at least 99 percent of these people are law-abiding, but, as we are also finding out in the U.S., it only takes a few troublemakers to wreak havoc—one to be exact in the case of Tunisia. How can non-Muslims influence the attitudes of Muslims to turn against Islamic terrorism?

At the same time, and in many ways adding to the Muslim population, there has been a huge growth in attempted migration to Europe by people from the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. Syrians are fleeing their civil war; others are fleeing the poverty and governmental ineptitude or worse of their home regions. 153,000 migrants crossed into Europe in toto in 2015 by the end of June; that is a 149 percent increase over the same period in 2014. And 63,000 reached largely impoverished Greece by sea, even more than the number reaching Italy, 62,000. By mid-2015 the number of people dying while trying to cross the Mediterranean had already reached nearly 1,900. Most trafficking sets out from Libya, which is practically lawless.

The European response has been ambiguous: on the one hand no one likes to see refugees drown at sea, and efforts are regularly made to save lives, but on the other, Europeans see such events as something of an invasion when Europe has enough problems taking care of on its own. And

there is always the well-founded fear that some of these “refugees” are really ISIS or al-Qaeda terrorists or something equally unattractive to Europeans.

Conclusion

Thus, we have three somewhat related current crisis situations in Europe: the direction of the European Union and its preferred currency, the euro; Russia/Ukraine et al.; and the lack of Muslim integration in Europe, now compounded by the huge refugee wave from Africa and the Near East. The United States is Europe’s most significant trade partner, and thus certainly has an important interest in a reasonable solution to the euro crisis. It also has a major role to play in resisting Russia, not least as head of NATO and the country that even non-NATO member Ukraine looks to for help and leadership. We in the U.S. also have similar problems regarding illegal aliens (from our own continent) and with ISIS infiltrators and “lone wolves.” At the same time the U.S. has probably done the best job of all the major powers in terms of integrating its newly arrived Muslim population, presumably because of America’s history as an immigrant nation.

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Established in 1994, the activities of IUCTS are guided by an International Research Council that offers recommendations for study on different aspects of terrorism, both conventional and unconventional. IUCTS is cooperating academically with universities and think tanks in over 40 countries, as well as with governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental bodies.

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Established in 1998 by the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, in Arlington, VA, ICTS administers IUCTS activities and sponsors an internship program in terrorism studies.

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