

## Eurofatigue

Written by Joseph Seceve

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To the outside observer, the European Union seems like "the place to be". Things are happening. EU member states are fusing together, former Soviet satellite states who are now part of the family are seeing their industries being modernised, and investors are willing to help draw these nations into western-style democracies.

If one takes a closer look however, this picture tends to be more illusory than real. Underneath the ideology of integration into a European superstate, the forces of reaction undeniably hold sway. In their eagerness to build a United States of Europe, to use Churchill's expression, the wealthier nations who once spearheaded the unification of Europe have made some serious miscalculations as to the level of inclusion of not only member states, but also how to deal with issues of ethnic minorities, and naturally, who holds power.

The philosopher Nietzsche once remarked that to be everyone's best friend means to be your own worst enemy. At this stage, European integration has indeed reached a point where integration into the Euroblock has run into a stalemate, especially among western EU members. Even though a general European constitution has been forgone by its two most liberal nations, the Netherlands and France in 2005, it is not over yet. EU leaders are constantly trying to circumvent all 'nay's', trying to find a niche wherein that 252-page document could still be ratified. The French and Dutch feared not only sacrificing local political decisions to Brussels, but also seeing their protected and subsidised (read: well-heeled) industries such as agriculture lose out to assist poorer member states. In order to break this stalemate, the agreed-upon integration is still being carried out behind the backs of Europeans as much as possible. The cracks are nonetheless starting to show.

Along with this, Western Europeans are not always aware of how history has impacted on their former communist neighbours, and could therefore easily lead to a breakdown of consensus

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regarding the greater good of the EU. Atrocious acts perpetrated in the West during the last century, such as Nazism, have been closed off with the Nuremberg Trials and Western Europeans have managed to move on, albeit carefully. Eastern nations on the other hand still have to recover from the unspeakable acts of horror that took place under the banner of communism.

Since these atrocities have never been fully elucidated, they are still unknown to many Westerners. The gulags in Hungary and Romania, where prisoners were force-fed with vomit and excrement, and coerced to spurn their family, religion and culture in order to become model Soviet citizens, are known to only a tiny handful of Westerners. In fact, while all these acts were taking place, many Western Europeans held communism in high regard. For example, Mao's little red book became a bestseller in France in 1968 and rumours of cannibalism taking place in some Chinese provinces were silenced. The sheer magnitude of the horror was published by investigative journalist Zheng Yi in his essay *Stèles rouges* in 1986. Cannibalism in this case was not due to famine as in Ukraine in the 1930s, but because of ideologically informed cruelty. Reactionaries had to be made an example of in the most horrific way. What better way than to eat them while they are still alive?

Some historians argue that France has yet to recover from the French Revolution two hundred years later, as hostility towards Christianity is still prevalent in France today. How long it would take former Eastern European nations to recover from communism is a question that should be on everyone's minds.

At the same time, Eastern EU members can clearly see the paralysing effect that mass immigration has caused the West, and that western EU politicians are compensating by - once again - suppressing opposition. The way Dutch politician Geert Wilders is being denied to speak out loud and even awaits prosecution is an unsettling precedent. The current EU leader, Czech president Vaclav Klaus, was quick to take a stab at Europe's silencing of opposition that sparked a walk-out of his fellow Union leaders. Klaus, who grew up in the shadow of the Soviet invasion of Prague, knows all too well where things might be heading if opposition is silenced.

In fact, even the art work that is displayed in Brussels, commissioned by the Czech president, which pokes fun at the EU nations' stereotypes, are not left without controversy. The EU leaders seem to be quite offended when parochial portraits of their countries are displayed, revealing a lack of understanding of their member states. Czechs are a people who are fond of nicknames and lampooning stereotypes. It is part of their culture. With so little understanding of member states for each other, it certainly would end up being a powerless and ultimately meaningless project of transnational subsidisation.

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Where these issues deal with integration problems between states, there is an even more significant integration problem within states. The question of European identity is constantly being redefined, considering that Europe now seems to realise it has chewed more than it could swallow. Some scholars tend to look towards the United States as having the answer, where a laissez-faire government allows for a smoother integration of minorities, even if they take longer to assimilate. However, percentage-wise, America took in immigrants in smaller numbers and in waves over time, while Europe took in a lot within a relatively short time, which might partially explain why integration in Europe seems to break down, causing minorities to resent the EU's integration approach altogether: a phenomenon that does not go unnoticed by its Eastern members.

The EU, it seems, is a house of cards, delicately held together. The Union would probably sacrifice freedom of speech to channel taxpayers' funds into keeping the EU together. In order to keep the Union afloat, only the slightest notion of nations closing ranks is considered taboo, which would help explain why rightwingers with the likes of Geert Wilders are backburnered in the interest of keeping the Union alive, even though Wilders' party would come in second if national elections were to be held in the Netherlands.

The EU might still want push its expansion and Constitution to the forefront, but the resistance it invokes has become undeniable. Politicians in Brussels are in the process of distancing themselves too much from their constituents. They do not seem to have any real answers to pressing problems. The current economic crisis would put the Union under further pressure as nations threaten to sever the financial pipeline to Brussels. Countries such as the Netherlands alone donates billions to subsidise poorer EU nations, while the Dutch economy has taken its worst knock in more than seventy years.

Originally the EU was drafted as a means to economically integrate the Block to the point that the constant threat of war in Europe could be averted for good. One tends to forget that in the run-up to the First World War the European economies also showed a high level of interdependence. At present, some member states still trade with nations that other member states would rather see punished because of their appalling human rights records. The French, Russians and Chinese traded with Iraq when other nations wanted to pressure erstwhile dictator Saddam Hussein to come clean with his possible weapons of mass destruction.

Europe has in fact gotten tangled up in a web of confusing trade relations, lack of vision, scepticism and doubt. Whether the Block would last through the current recession is a mystery and might possibly split up into smaller units.

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Whichever way one looks at it, Europe has not made much progress so far. Minorities are flaming at the nostrils shouting Jihad against the west, anti-Israel (and therefore anti-Jewish) sentiments are flaring up again and the ever-present fear of losing autonomy over one's region has once again become a pressing issue. People seem to have woken up from the post-war euphoria of the sixties.

History is still with Europe. The important question is: Are Europeans still in tune with their history?