

The Future of Europe: An Analysis Based on History and Realpolitik

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Right-wing parties have not come into power as expected for the time being, and populist riots are constantly occurring in society, but the dominant tone of EU politics is still left-of-center; the need for independent diplomacy and defense is even more pressing for the EU as a large economy; Mao Zedong's wise assertion that "political power comes out of the barrel of a gun".

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Introduction

In May 2003, Jurgen Habermas, a German philosopher, and Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher, co-authored a powerful paper: *February 15, or What Binds Europeans Together: A Plea for a Common Foreign Policy, Beginning in the Core of Europe*. Based on the concept of *Core Europe*, they appeal to the Kantian ideal of a global federation. Now, 20 years later, if we evaluate Habermas's vision, has it come true? (Daniel, Max, & John, 2005)

No Fully to the Far Right: The Current Political Situation in Europe

The French National Assembly election in July 2024, the left-wing coalition "New Popular Front" came first with 182 seats, followed by Macron's center-right "Together", winning 163 seats, while the far-right "National Alliance", which had a large lead in the first round of voting, finally won only 143 seats. Media analysis, the "National Alliance" accidental capsize, the main reason is that the left alliance and the center of a "tactical cooperation": After the latest round of voting, the Left alliance and the center joined forces to form the "Republican Front", mobilizing 217 candidates to withdraw, concentrated votes, to ensure that non-far-right candidates win. According to French scholars, "France is now in a situation where no one party has a majority or can control a majority with only a few partners". So, France needs to form a coalition government, which could be a government of the left or a government of the right. The initiative is in the hands of Jean-Luc Melenchon, leader of the leftist coalition New Popular Front, which won the most seats in parliament.

Also in July, Keir Starmer led the Labour Party to a landslide victory in the British general election to

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become Britain's new prime minister. In more than four years as leader of the opposition and leader of the Labour Party, Starmer took advantage of the Conservative Party's own instability to move Labour's economic and national security policies toward the center and reposition the party as a credible center-left. And brought it back to the centre ground of British politics with a chance of winning a general election. After winning the election, Starmer said the new cabinet would put country first and party second, focusing on issues such as the NHS, clean energy, education and the interests of the working class, and focusing on building a service-oriented government. After taking office, Starmer quickly contacted "core European" countries such as France and Germany in meetings on different occasions, and said that he would strengthen relations with the EU.

Three years ago, the German general election brought an end to Merkel's 16-year tenure as Premier of Germany. Her last government of the CDU/CSU and the Social Democrats (SPD) was replaced by a coalition of SPD, Greens and FDP led by Olaf Scholz, with pro-American trans-Atlanticists gaining an unprecedented strength not seen since reunification (Havena, 2022). However, the German people still seem to be dissatisfied, with Scholz and his Social Democrats performing poorly, and Alice Weidel's Alternative for Germany (AfD) well ahead of the ruling party in the European Parliament elections, which will be held in September 2025.

While scholars of practical politics and international studies consider populism and right-wing politics an important threshold when discussing Europe: Will the EU integrate further? Or will it fall apart at some point in the future? (Qiang, & Demin, 2020) However, from the perspective of the realpolitik of Britain, France and Germany, right-wing parties have not come into power as expected for the time being, and populist riots are constantly occurring in society, but the dominant tone of EU politics is still left-of-center.

The Development of the European Union: A Historical Review

Most textbooks focus on the process from Europe, from coal and steel pooling to the Maastricht Treaty, but the real reason the founding six nations came together was based on compromise with the post-war world order. Therefore, the EU is not only a regional political and economic bloc, but also a "supranational" organization with the nature of sovereignty transfer. In other words, some of the sovereignty of the member states has been transferred to Brussels, and some of it is permanent (the national flag and the EU flag must be flown together in international public places). In addition, the treaties of the EU together form the cornerstone of the legal framework of each country and gradually evolve into the common "domestic law" of each country.

Since the founding of the European Union, the largest share of its budget (35%-40%) has been spent on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which protects the single European market by preventing the dumping of foreign agricultural products in the form of government subsidies and acquisitions.

In March 1995, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg formally implemented the Schengen Agreement, and the Convention came into full force in July 1995. The Schengen Agreement has eliminated internal borders, greatly facilitating the free movement of people, goods, money and services within the EU. Regardless of whether they are citizens of EU member States or not, foreigners from any country who have obtained a legal residence and entry visa in one of these countries are also granted the right to travel freely in the Schengen countries.

However, the Schengen Agreement has facilitated the influx of Eastern European labor into Western Europe, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, but it has aggravated the problem of population loss in Eastern European countries. The population of Bulgaria and Lithuania has declined by 20%, Romania by 15%, Poland and Hungary by 12%, and most of the losses are young people. The rapidly deteriorating demographic structure

in Eastern Europe is one of the reasons why Eastern European countries were dissatisfied with Western European countries.

As a union, the EU has a common central bank and a common currency, but no common fiscal policy. Since the establishment of the EU, northern European countries such as Germany have strong manufacturing competitiveness, while southern European countries (especially Greece, Italy, Spain) have no industrial advantages. Due to the adoption of a unified currency, Greece and other countries can not rely on exchange rate depreciation and other means to maintain industrial competitiveness, can only watch the gradual decline of their own industries, not only lost a large number of jobs, but also lost an important source of tax revenue, and had to embark on the road of borrowing to survive. This was an important reason for the outbreak of the European debt crisis in 2010.

The EU's energy interests are increasingly at odds with its defence needs; From a geopolitical point of view, Eastern European countries (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, etc.) are at the front line of contact with Russia, they have historical contradictions with Russia, are tough to Russia, and also hope that Germany and France and other core European countries can provide certain military support. After the 2014 Crimean crisis, Eastern European countries feared becoming the next Ukraine in the face of Russian expansionism, and hoped that Germany and France would lead the EU in curbing Russia's military expansion. But Germany and France are reluctant to part with Russia's cheap energy, and in early 2015, Germany and France coordinated the peace talks between Ukraine and Russia, signing the *Minsk Agreement*, which requires Ukraine not only to acquiesce to the ceding of Crimea, but also to recognize the autonomy of the Donbas region. The deal has left eastern European countries losing faith in the security commitments of Germany and France. Eastern European countries have accelerated the process of following the United States, especially after Biden took office, and the foreign policy of most Eastern European countries almost follows that of Britain and the United States rather than Germany and France.

The Russia-Ukraine war of 2022 officially declared that the EU was forced to choose between its economic interests and its security needs. Leftwing claims of globalization, environmental protection, and equality are no longer beneficial, and the whole EU has shifted to the right. Manufacturing differences and fiscal disunity exacerbate the contradictions between southern and northern European countries; The disunity of energy interests and defense needs also delayed the contradiction between Western and Eastern European countries after the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

Islam in Europe: Propaganda or Fact?

The history of Europe since 1990 had been a process in which the developed countries of Western Europe, led by Germany, have continuously absorbed labor from the socialist bloc countries of the former Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, as well as the relatively underdeveloped former European Community areas (Greece, Southern Italy, Spain, Portugal). For the developed countries in Western Europe led by Germany, Eastern Europe means a large number of high-quality, and there was no conflict of religion, culture and values of the age of cheap labor, so the population of the eastern Soviet area into Western Europe, the historical strategy of the EU, Germany and France.

In fact, the root of the 2015 European refugee crisis was that Western Europe wants to use the crisis in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Ukraine and other countries to obtain labor from these countries, but the result was completely different from that in the 1990s.

The traditional view is that the refugee crisis in Europe has triggered a serious social and economic crisis in Europe. Many countries and political figures have severely criticized the EU's refugee policy, believing that the EU's long-standing policy of free movement of population and open borders has seriously affected the national security of Europe, resulting in the infiltration of Islamic terrorism, Islamic sharia law practitioners, and foreign refugees. This has led to the rise of right-wing populist parties and organisations.

More recently, the British government has faced nationwide right-wing anti-immigrant riots, and the aftermath of the Yellow Vests movement in France is still unresolved. However, taking the "PEGIDA" march movement in Germany since 2014 as an example, according to the survey of German scholars, the typical Pegida participants in Germany are middle-class, non-denominational and middle-aged men from Dresden and Saxony, who are educated, employed and have a net income above the average level in Saxony. The dominant motivations of Pegida participants were dissatisfaction with the political system (54%), dissatisfaction with public media (20%), and dissatisfaction with immigration and refugee policies (15%). Therefore, the organizers and propaganda of Pegida started from the extreme right (including some East German neo-Nazis) and conspiracy theorists who questioned the mainstream media, but in fact, in the case of European economic depression and EU expansion, it led to the participation of those citizens who were afraid of capital market circulation, as a political movement to safeguard citizens' own rights.

The Future of the European Union? Is a Military Community Possible?

From the EU since the 1990s to before the Russo-Ukrainian war. In its narrow sense, the EU is a political grouping of 27 countries, no different from ASEAN and the African Union. However, the European Union in a broad sense is also the more influential "European Union", the Schengen area, SEPA (Single Euro Payments Area), etc., and even the European military part of NATO are also a kind of "covenant".

With Russia providing Europe with cheap energy, the United States providing Europe with cheap defense, and China providing Europe with cheap goods, the EU had not only maintained basic political stability and economic prosperity, but also basically met its security needs. The EU's foreign policy had always tried to maintain a delicate balance between China, the United States and Russia. Pacifism and universal values are very popular in the EU, because the more peaceful the world is, the greater the role of the moral high ground, the more the EU can enjoy this great good.

The EU had managed to strike the balance of economics and diplomacy that has made it the region with the highest quality of life in the world, with cheap energy hedging the high human costs of welfare societies, with US military protection hedging the security threat from Russia, and with cheap goods hedging the inflationary pressures of loose economic policies. The work intensity is much lower than that of East Asia, but the per capita income is not inferior to that of the United States, which has become the happiest region in the world and the most attractive region for immigrants.

In the past, Western Europeans were more likely to trust their own governments than the EU, and when their governments had the ability to influence the direction of Europe, they also had confidence in the EU. In Central and Eastern Europe, the public used to believe that the EU's technocrats were more reliable than their own leaders, but the 2015 refugee crisis changed that, and Western Europeans had less confidence in the government's ability to shape EU policy. Trust in the European Union has diminished, and people in central and eastern Europe are more suspicious of Brussels than they are of their own governments. (Ivan, 2020)

The EU White Paper "the future of the EU" of March 1, 2017. It discusses five possible directions for the

EU up to 2025:

(1) Carrying on; Under these circumstances, the EU27 continues to carry on reforms and overcome one crisis after another.

(2) Nothing but the Single Market; In this case, the EU27 no longer pursues a common political agenda and focuses solely on deepening the Single Market. The four basic principles of the single market remain in place, and the free movement of goods, services, capital and labor will continue. It is worth pointing out that this idea was the model of the EU that the UK strongly advocated in the first place.

(3) Those Who Want to do More; A multi-speed Europe, in which the EU27 proceed as it does now, but with more work. the possibility of some countries integrating in specific areas but not others could lead to internal “coalitions of the willing” in policy areas such as defence, security and tax.

(4) Doing Less More Efficiently; In this scenario, the EU puts more emphasis on investing limited resources in some policy areas, but reducing investment in some areas with less positive impact. As a result, the EU27 has been able to have stronger enforcement capabilities in certain areas, while doing little in others.

(5) Doing Much More Together; there would be a powerful integration of member states, the option promoted by Eurocrats: European federalism.¹

Eu officials expect the fifth option, while the bloc’s heavyweights prefer the third, with a multi-speed Europe backed by the big four—France, Germany, Italy and Spain. A multi-speed Europe or a compromise version of the European Federation is more likely to pass in the future.

The EU was born at a time when the world was very different. Based on hostility to the Warsaw Pact and memories of World War II, the EU essentially did not come up with an ideology. Previous generations of European politicians skilfully made them a reality that they could not live without. But the problem of differentiation within Europe has never been solved.

Conclusion

On 13 November 2017, the 23 countries of the European Union signed a treaty agreement on European Defence in Brussels, which is an important step towards the realization of the European Union’s defence policy and the establishment of an independent EU defence. A total of 20 joint defense in the military, logistics and other fields have laid the framework and foundation for EU military cooperation, and the EU defense preliminary entity has been officially launched.

The 2017 White paper also did not foresee a Russia-Ukraine war, and the need for independent diplomacy and defense is even more pressing for the EU as a large economy. After Merkel’s abdication, the “German-Franco axis” turned to the “Franco-German axis”, and French President Macron advocated the establishment of an independent euro settlement system; Advocates the creation of an EU army.

In April 2022, 20 years later, Habermas, an advocate of “core Europe”, published a feature on the Russia-Ukraine war situation in *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, in which Habermas lamented: “The European Union, if it does not want its social and political way of life to be destroyed from the outside as well as eroded from within, can be politically active only if it is also militarily self-sustaining”.² This kind of argument reminds Chinese people of Mao Zedong’s wise assertion that “political power comes out of the barrel of a gun”.

¹ *White Paper on the Future of Europe: Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025*. Brussels, 1.3.2017.

² *On Ukraine: War and Anger*. Featured by Jurgen Habermas, 28 April 2022 *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*.

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