Europe's Future and Jihad

Eurocrisis in the Press

By Roberto Orsi

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Recent events in Paris have been commented upon by political leaders and public intellectuals alike with the recurring argument that France will emerge stronger from this incident. Countless other commentators have repeated that the ideas of an open, democratic, liberal, rule-of-law-based, multicultural, sexually-liberated, "free" society, with open borders, freedom of speech, of religion, of circulation, what can be termed "the European way", will prevail. The standard narrative of the events in Paris has insisted on their nature of a crime perpetrated by a puny group of alienated minds, who are waging war against "Western values" and who will certainly be defeated. That may be so.

However, looking at it from a broader perspective, a much less reassuring picture of what is taking place starts to take form, alongside with a series of admittedly disturbing and regrettable questions, born out of a sudden radical doubt. Considering the trajectory connecting the 2004 and 2005 bombings in Madrid and London a decade ago to the unfolding scenario of these days and projecting it towards the future, it is worth investigating whether the precise opposite of what European leaders claim is occurring. What if Europe finds itself on a completely wrong track?

A rising sense that the continent finds itself in a systemic political crisis of historical proportions can be felt everywhere. Political leaders and intellectuals are panicking to construct a version and interpretation of developments in the Old Continent, one which may preserve the integrity of the "European way" in the face on the one hand of exponentially growing signs of deterioration and decay, on the other, of rising criticisms, which pre-date the recent massacres, and whose symptoms are ubiquitous. Among these, certainly the most prominent appear to be the rise of "populist", parties such as UKIP, *Front National*, and *Alternative für Deutschland*, the spread of the PEGIDA demonstrations, the heated "immigration debates" in every country. Many are trying to argue that these developments constitute the regurgitation of some uncomfortable past, or are the product of sheer ignorance or prejudice. Much more likely, as even some liberal and radical commentators have started to accept, they constitute the reaction to some genuine and severe political problem, such as the rapid spread of degradation, the worsening of economic conditions, the loss of territorial control by the authorities, the place of minorities communities, of past, present and future demographic trends (including migrations) in Europe. None of these will go away with some "debate" or "demonstration", but it will certainly continue to grow, and even escalate, in the foreseeable future. It does not seem to be too far-fetched to argue at this point that European politics (and perhaps world politics with a different focus), will be dominated by demographic questions, particularly concerning the rapidly increasing ethnic-religious fragmentation of European countries, for many decades to come, particularly considering their economic and security implications.

Despite the reassuring words that the "European way" is sound and will prevail, both the rampant jihad and the mounting protests from the core of Europe point to the same thing and have the same cause: Europe is rotting and dying.

Europe is a dying continent of dying nations. The uncomfortable impression is that the "European way", which delivered prosperity, peace, harmony to every European after the tragedy of the twentieth century, has evolved with several turns in political culture not only after 1945, but most importantly after 1968 and 1992, into a rigid ideological recipe, however elaborated in critical glosses, for the long term (but not too long) implosion of Europeans societies. In a typical dialectical fashion, the fulfilment of a system seems to be bringing about its own demise. This is extremely unfortunate because the themes which animate the "European way" do constitute moral and political achievements whose core ethical validity is difficult to underestimate.

Anybody looking at Europe's demographic trends, at the structural crisis of its economy, at the sheer chaos which boils under the surface of the euro, knows that Europe is doing away with itself. Even the pontiff has put forwards this view, articulated in more diplomatic tones, during a recent visit to the European parliament. Many in the rest of the world have long acknowledged the European leadership's complete lack of vision, the inability to see any secular trend, the refusal to admit the existence of vital threats and problems.

Protest movements arise not so much from the fear of the foreigner, but from the fear of (Europe's) death, and by the sense of doom which many fellow Europeans, "as sheep having no shepherd", more or less consciously feel when observing that the very political leadership who should care about their well-being appears to have turned into the exact opposite, namely the guarantors of a long term implosion. It is curious how, in an intellectual environment literally obsessed with the problem of suffering, the suffering of a dying Europe and the actual pain of seeing one's own home decaying is quickly put aside as insignificant.

At this juncture, the unavoidable suspicion arises, namely that, if European leaders really cared about the future of the continent, they would have never brought the situation to the current point, and more importantly, they would ask themselves different questions. Even worse, the kind of political culture prevalent today is the single most important obstacle to a change of course, as it prevents not only the envisaging of solutions, but most importantly the sheer recognition of the problems. Fixated on the short-termism of electoral politics, it completely refuses to investigate the trends of long term social transformations.

"The Blind Leading the Blind", by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1568)

Despite being verbally condemned by Angela Merkel and David Cameron, the ideological frame of European societies has remained in place, with its gross underestimation of risks which are now becoming all too apparent. It is worth mentioning that those risks where correctly envisaged long time ago by many. Those Cassandras simply pointed at the severely inadequate understanding of the role of collective identities in politics. The current political-cultural ideology vastly underestimates the trans-generational and historical aspects of collective identities, and the political relevance of theological propositions. It constructs a disputable image of mass movements of millions of people as a "naturalistic" fact, with no serious political implication. It ignores the political agency of organised ethnic-religious communities, together with their ambitions, and their spatial dimension. It misunderstands "culture" as "folklore", conveniently forgetting the political side of seemingly non-political cultural traits. More importantly, it overlooks that humans can be politically organised not just on different, but on opposite principles, albeit clearly not within the same territorial unit, at the cost of accepting the emergence of unsolvable conflicts between minorities, and between majority and minority. It overestimates the persuasiveness of the "European way" as a viable political discourse to be adopted by everybody everywhere, the availability of economic resources to cope with any cost it may arise from this experiment, and the power of legal-abstract conceptions of national/collective identity. Finally, it presents no viable exist strategy option and explicitly affirms that, should things not turn out as in an admittedly hyper-optimistic

scenario, it will be disastrous.

Moreover, European and Western elites have embarked in unnecessary, counterproductive, and politically blind initiatives of political and military involvement in Middle Eastern affairs, very often against popular will at home, discharging on their own constituencies very high costs and producing an understandable Muslim hostility, which focuses however systematically on the wrong targets. Italy's complete abandonment of any meaningful form of territorial and border control by the state, against all security and EU commitments, completes the picture.

In no way can this represent sound, prudent, careful, long-sighted way of ruling Europe and its future. Within this picture, the above mentioned statement about the eventual success of the "European way" appears considerably less credible.

If Europe is dying, "wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together". Like in any civilisational collapse in history, the empty spaces left by a succumbing culture are filled by the expansion into its former territorial dimension by other, more dynamic societies. The jihadists are an expression of this situation. They are the avant-garde of the politicisation process within the underlying population replacement. They are not at all waging war against the "European way". The "European way" is the perfect environment for them to thrive. To quote Mao Zedong, in this political-cultural context of early twenty-first century Europe, they "move amongst the people as a *fish* swims in the sea". They could not ask for a better environment. Their numbers are growing exponentially, their network extends to every corner of the continent.

While European intellectuals are now preoccupied with the construction of sophisticated arguments to envisage limits to freedom of speech without giving the impression of receding in front of violence, the jihadists' political motivation is something much more elementary than that: *conquest*.

On the point of freedom of speech in fact, the European intelligentsia is conveniently forgetting that, if the cartoons were so intolerably offensive, French courts would have censored them. In theory indeed, the evaluation of whether something is offensive or not in the face of public order and constitutional rights belongs to the state through its judges. But the cartoons were not banned by the courts, indicating that they cannot be considered as offensive as many claim. The point the jihadists indirectly scored is to remark that French courts shall have no jurisdiction on matters regulated by Islamic norms and jurisprudence. They have enforced the authority of Islamic norms over the French state, whose legitimacy they cannot recognise, as it is not derived by the source of Islamic law and by their divine nature. What is conquest if not the forced reformulation of the hierarchy in the sources of law? European intellectuals should also finally realise that conflict is not about ideas, but much more fundamentally, about *land* and *sovereignty*. If this does not appear visible just observing the time horizon of the next electoral cycle, imagining the situation of Europe in 2050, as the jihadists are certainly doing, will provide a more fruitful perspective. In the current context, jihadists are winning and will continue to win.

If the jihadists are Europe's enemies, they are not going to be defeated by the pointless deployment of soldiers in the city centres, nor by printing millions of cartoons. Channeling the emotional reaction to the Paris massacre towards such unproductive directions hints again at the political leadership's will not to really address the questions at stake. This strengthens the position of the enemy. The true battle is the overcoming of the current constrains within Europe's political culture for the formulation of long term strategic visions, which is only possible by reconceptualising of the way in which the Europeans address their fundamental life-choices and priorities, with relation to their political community of membership. If the current protest movements want to amount to something more than simple, possibly ephemeral demonstrations, they need to understand the importance of thinking about themselves not so much as "the people" as in (how outdated?) legal-constitutional language, but "a people", a community which looks beyond the contingency of today's horizon, therefore focusing primarily, precisely, and not surprisingly, as minorities do, on youths and children, which are the future and the actual wealth of any society. Protest movements, which will eventually find or are in the process of finding a more sophisticated leadership, may also want to consider that in the short and medium term a change in the course of institutional politics is unlikely to occur, for the reasons expressed above, albeit electoral commitment may certainly remain an important component

of their activity. In sum, protest movements should constitutes themselves as communities and "nations".

Jihad is also not going to be defeated by means of more "integration". Even putting aside the ambiguities inherent to such concept, at least three questions arise in its regard: why should anybody try to integrate himself in a rotting and largely self-defeating culture? It is certainly not worth doing, especially looking forward to 2050. Secondly, the possibility of integration is inversely proportional to the numbers involved in the process; but because a *Denkverbot* hangs on any meaningful demographic discussion, integration has in such context little or no meaning as well. Thirdly, if a considerable part of the European intellectual elite is engaged in an effort to demonstrate that Europe has no and should have no specific identity, one has to wonder what integration should really consist of, as one cannot integrate with someone who is theorising his own non-existence. Moreover, seen from the other side, it is certainly preferable at this point to embrace religious radicalism than one of the various urban subcultures (deserving no further comment), which seem to constitute the only alternative on offer. At least religious radicalism entails links to some actual *tradition*, which can certainly speak to the hearts and minds of young immigrants as it has done for centuries to their ancestors, however its theologico-political propositions may seem unacceptable to Europeans.

The jihadists, as Europe's enemy, are the embodiment of Europe's own existential question. Europe has to learn from them, as from any enemy. Europe will not defeat the jihadists if it will continue to rot and implode. If Europe will manage somehow to reverse the current trend, the jihadists will be automatically defeated. If Europe does not change and insists on the current track, it will certainly cease to exist as a recognisable historical force, and its demise will be well deserved. It will serve as a lesson for others not to embark themselves on Europe's path.

Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the Euro Crisis in the Press blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

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