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DEFENDING EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IN A DECISIVE ELECTION YEAR

Gunther Krichbaum

MARCH 25th, 2017, marked the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome. This treaty, signed by Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM). These six countries had already been cooperating since 1951, in the context of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The main objective of this historic treaty was to secure peace within Europe by means of mutual control over coal and steel, the two most vital resources in waging war.

At the same time, contracting states intended to modernize the production of coal and steel in order to accelerate post-war reconstruction.

By the time of its founding 60 years ago, the EEC had laid the groundwork for the four fundamental freedoms that are still in force today: the free movement of goods, services, persons, and capital. In addition, a common trade policy and the establishment of European institutions had been agreed upon. The signing of the Treaty of Rome is the founding date for what eventually became the European Union.

EUROPEAN SUCCESS

This European integration process is an unrivaled success story. Sovereign countries jointly decided that war must never again be an option to resolve policy disputes, and that differences must be settled at the negotiating table. At the same time, the contracting states came to realize

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Photo: Courtesy of Gunther Krichbaum

Chancellor Merkel and Gunther Krichbaum in consultation

that growth and prosperity can best be promoted through close cooperation.

The establishment of democratic processes, free trade, respect for human rights, freedom of opinion, and freedom of the press have created an era of peace and prosperity that Europe had never seen. For the countries of Europe, which had fought each other in World War II just 12 years prior to signing the Treaty of Rome, the EEC became a union of peace, freedom, and democracy. The European Union is a model for peace, especially for the founding states of Western Europe. The EU was an opportunity for reconciliation, where conflicts

were resolved peacefully rather than through wars. Large and small countries would meet with mutual respect and on equal terms.

Such a view of the EU changed with the fall of the Iron Curtain. For the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which joined the EU after the end of East-West confrontation, the EU symbolized a union of political and economic freedom. It is the economic progress of these countries that should be especially highlighted. If one compares the economic development of Poland between 1989 and 2017, it quickly becomes obvious how much has been

achieved. In Bulgaria and Romania, for example, both of which joined the EU exactly a decade ago, much remains to be done, yet they too have made immense progress.

In spite of all the difficulties caused by renewed populism or protectionist tendencies, I am deeply convinced that the EU has not lost its attractiveness to many countries. As was the case with the founding states in Western Europe, the EU offers an opportunity to increase and consolidate economic development and prosperity through integration, especially for the countries of the Western Balkans. Here, the EU is once again offering countries a platform to enter into a peaceful dialogue with neighbors, and to be able to critically reflect their own respective histories.

Having such a critical discussion about its own history was painful for Germany, but reconciliation with its former archenemies was indispensable. This was especially true vis-à-vis France, where a centuries-long rivalry had led to many devastating wars. Overcoming this history step by step was possible within the framework of the EEC. Over the course of time, civil society has also played an increasingly important role—among other things,

through various youth exchange programs and inter-city partnerships. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, this was also to be achieved with Poland relatively quickly.

The basic principles of the Treaty of Rome continue to exist today in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty. The four basic freedoms and EU integration are a success model. The survival of the EU depends on defending these achievements, which are part of our institutional DNA.

Neither the forthcoming Brexit negotiations nor the migration crisis can leave Europeans in doubt.

That being said, the past decade has not been easy for Europe. The global economic and financial crisis, which began as a real estate crisis in the United States in 2007, led to serious disruptions in Europe. Many EU countries are still struggling with the consequences, especially with an unbearably high rate of youth unemployment. In addition, the repayment ability of individual Eurozone member countries was questioned by the markets for the first time. The special focus here has been, and remains, on Greece.

However, despite all the difficulties, I feel very strongly about promoting the European idea. To do so, one must clearly

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underline the most important challenges of today and for the time to come.

REFUGEES

The root cause of the migration movement that reached Germany in August 2015 had its origin in different crisis regions around the globe. Nearly 900,000 people found refuge in Germany in 2015. To a large extent, these refugees came from Syria, where a civil war has been raging for the past six years, and where the country's ruler, has been fighting his own people with might and main. This escape movement has not only put Germany's resilience to the test, but also challenged many other EU countries that have either taken in refugees or secured the EU's external borders.

A combination of factors, including most notably the EU-Turkey agreement, better protection of the EU's external borders, closure of the Balkan route, and stricter repatriation measures, have resulted in a considerable reduction of refugee flows to Europe in 2016 and 2017.

BREXIT

The decision by our British friends to leave the European Union is very regrettable and represents a backlash to the European unification process. UK Prime Minister Theresa May's commitment to a "hard

Brexit" and the desire for a comprehensive free trade agreement with the European Union creates more clarity—for the time being.

What is also clear, however, is that it will be difficult to complete these negotiations in the two-year withdrawal process provided under Article 50. This creates considerable uncertainty for the markets and the economy. During the Brexit negotiations, all sides should refrain from demonstrations of power. The EU and the UK are very closely linked, and it is in the self-interest of all partners for relations to remain close and friendly once the Brexit process is completed. This can only be achieved if future relations are characterized by fairness.

The threat of tax dumping certainly does not comply with this idea. The EU will not enter into a tax competition and will ensure this with provisions installed in the negotiations. At the same time, it is an appeal to all EU members not to let this issue divide them in the exit negotiations, in order to avoid a dangerous precedent. Once the negotiations have been completed, it will become clear what consequences the UK's exit from the EU's single market will have for the entire country and for political developments in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

TRUMP

Another turning point was marked by the election of U.S. President Donald Trump. The outcome of the election came as a surprise to me—and probably to most people in the EU. An American administration pursuing a protectionist economic course, questioning the existence of NATO, supporting the UK’s departure from the EU, and criticizing the euro as a common currency and the EU as a whole, represents a new era in transatlantic relations.

For the first time since World War II, a country in Europe used military force to annex part of a neighboring sovereign state and redraw its borders.

Trump’s travel ban, his trade policy, and his intent to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accords, represent a break from the values which the EU and America had long shared. However, the “Trump challenge” can also bind Europe closer together, especially when it comes to common foreign and security policy.

RUSSIA

The year 2014 marked a deep cut in the European postwar order. For the first time since World War II, a country in Europe used military force to annex part of a neighboring sovereign state and redraw its borders. The annexation of Crimea by Russia and the civil war in Eastern Ukraine launched by Moscow were preceded by civil society protests in Kiev. These

were triggered by the refusal of then President Viktor Yanukovich to sign an association agreement between the EU and Ukraine.

The resulting conflict in Eastern Ukraine is still ongoing and is estimated to have cost the country 10,000 lives. It also marked the starting point of a propaganda campaign launched by the Kremlin against EU and NATO states—the kind that the world has not seen since the end of the Cold War. Anti-Western and pro-Russian propaganda through media channels such as Russia Today or Sputnik, social media bots, fake news, leaked documents, and targeted cyberattacks have increased massively in recent years. The use of such methods, and the dubious role played by Moscow during the American presidential elections in 2016, provide a taste of what we can expect the run-up to the German elections in September 2017.

RIGHT-WING POPULISM

In addition to external crises imported into the EU—such as the financial crisis that began in the United States, the refugee crisis mainly caused by the civil war in Syria, or Russia’s aggression in Ukraine—the focus throughout 2017 will be on internal challenges: since the

outbreak of the financial crisis 10 years ago, right-wing populist parties have become increasingly popular in Europe. At the same time, they are now receiving support from Russia (technically, financially, and with regard to content).

Anti-Western propaganda is increasingly used by right-wing populists with close ties to Moscow, in order to intensify anti-democratic and anti-American resentment among European voters. Both old and new EU member states are equally affected. In addition to countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Croatia, there are now strong, right-wing parties in the Scandinavian countries, as well as in Austria, the Netherlands, and France—to mention the most prominent cases.

In these last three countries, parliamentary and presidential elections recently took place. Fortunately, neither the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), nor Geert Wilders’ right-wing populist Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands and the French Front National (FN) were able to emerge victorious from the elections. Le Pen called for the withdrawal of France from the EU and NATO, and received millions of

campaign contributions from Russia. Moscow’s financial support for the FN has been proven, while other right-wing populist parties may also be financially supported by the Kremlin.

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For Germany, the success of the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) in many regional elections has been a novelty. At the same time, however, the AfD is by no means becoming the strongest party in the Bundestag. AfD’s demands for a withdrawal from the EU and NATO, the closure of borders, the lifting of sanctions against

Russia, and the end of international free trade agreements aim in the same direction as the FPÖ, the FN, and the PVV. The lifting of sanctions and possibly further withdrawals from the EU would be detrimental to the Union and its member states. Only Moscow would emerge victorious from such a development.

Against this background, and with regard to the upcoming election in Germany, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify some of Russia’s central claims, which are constantly being used against the West by both Moscow and the European far-right parties.

NATO ENLARGEMENT

Russia has unilaterally redrawn borders in Europe. This has thereby fundamentally jeopardized the European security order that was tediously built up after World War II. At the same time, Russia violated various international agreements which it had itself signed.

The UN Charter reaffirms the principle of the inviolability and integrity of borders. Similarly, unilateral declarations of independence are illegal under international law if they are associated with one-sided use of force, which was clearly the case in Ukraine. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1990 Charter of Paris, and the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act were also signed by Moscow. All of these explicitly emphasize the inviolability of borders and the right to self-determined membership in political and military alliances.

Much more striking, however, was Russia's breach of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurance, which it also signed. That memorandum was supposed to ensure the sovereignty and the borders of Ukraine. The agreement also guaranteed the abandonment of Ukraine's nuclear weapons, which Ukraine had maintained in the

course of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Demands to annex Crimea as part of Russia had already existed at that time in parts of Russian society and politics. For this reason, the territorial integrity of Ukraine was explicitly stipulated in the memorandum and signed by Russia.

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In addition, we must not forget that the West has supported Russia on a whole series of issues. The format of the G7 was expanded to become the G8, even though Russia did not meet the economic requirements. It was, therefore, a political gesture of friendship to open up further communication channels with Moscow and integrate Russia deeper into the world economy. Russia is also a member of the World Trade Organization, the Council of Europe, and the G20. In addition, Russia, and no other former Soviet republic, was left with a seat in the UN Security Council.

Russian anti-western propaganda claims that during the negotiations leading up to the Two Plus Four Agreement, the then German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher had promised Russia, NATO would not take in new members in Eastern Europe. This

has not been put down in a contract, which is a prerequisite for the implementation of decisions in such an alliance. More importantly however, from NATO's side, only Germany, the United Kingdom, France and the United States were involved in the Two Plus Four Agreement. No other NATO members were involved at that time, which made a unanimous decision within NATO impossible. Such a promise simply did not exist. Perhaps the most important counter-argument for me however is the thought of how the public in Eastern Europe would have responded if Germany and Russia bilaterally had decided on Eastern Europe's everlasting future neutrality. The analogy to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is not far away then.

SELF-DETERMINED ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP

As early as 1975, the Soviet Union, the United States, Canada, and the majority of European states had signed the Helsinki Final Act, which guaranteed countries the right to freely select the alliances they wish to join or form. This principle was reaffirmed in the 1997 NATO-Russia Council Founding Act, signed two years before the first round of NATO enlargement. No state was forced to become a member of NATO and the EU—or any other international organization, for that matter. Indeed, the countries of Central and Eastern Eu-

rope have joined NATO because they saw Russia as a matter of concern.

Looking back at the wars in Georgia and Ukraine from today's perspective, I believe it is a fair assessment to say that their concerns were not unfounded. In addition, it should be highlighted that out of respect for Russia, and due to political pressure from Germany, NATO decided against pursuing an accelerated membership procedure for Georgia and Ukraine at its Bucharest Summit in 2008.

Far more crucial for me, however, is the allegation that the EU had somehow lured Ukraine away from Russia with an association agreement. I strongly disagree with this assessment. It is a matter of free choice of sovereign countries as to which international organization they wish to join. There are enough examples of countries that made very different decisions. Countries like Belarus and Armenia have opted against closer ties with NATO and the EU. Sweden, Finland, and Austria are only members of the EU, but not NATO. Iceland and Norway are only members of NATO, but not the EU. Iceland was already in the middle of the negotiation process with the EU, but stopped its negotiations after a change of government. Switzerland is neither a member of NATO nor of the EU. And Serbia, for example, has been pursuing the goal

of EU membership for years, but has clearly expressed its intention not to become a member of NATO.

Unlike Russia in the case of Ukraine, neither the EU nor NATO have attacked one of these countries after they decided for or against membership in them. Clearly there are enough examples of countries in Europe that have voluntarily opted for or against membership in an international organization. Therefore, Russian President Vladimir Putin's claim that an EU association agreement with Ukraine would inevitably have led to the deployment of NATO troops in Crimea simply is simply absurd.

NATO AS A THREAT

Against this backdrop, the fact that Russia attempts to portray NATO as a threat is difficult to comprehend. NATO has already denied Georgia and Ukraine quick membership. Russia's actions in Eastern Europe, on the other hand, has become increasingly aggressive, especially since the onset of the Ukraine crisis. Russia's support of "frozen conflicts" in Transnistria, the Donbass, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia raises the question of whether Moscow intends to resolve these conflicts, or perhaps appears more interested in destabilizing states in its immediate neighborhood.

Russia has already simulated the use of nuclear weapons against Poland and the invasion of the Baltic States in regular military exercises, such as the annual *Zapad* (Russian for "West"). In addition, Russian fighter jets and submarines are regular intruders into the airspace of various North Sea and Baltic Sea countries. After the annexation of Crimea, Russia's military leadership announced that the

One can only wonder if Russia can be perceived as anything other than a threat by Eastern European countries.

Russian military could occupy Kiev within 14 days. The Baltic States and Warsaw could also be quickly occupied. All of this is being justified through Russia's ideol-

ogy of *Ruski Mir*, which is a self-declared responsibility to protect ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking minorities in Russia's neighboring states. Considering such facts, one can only wonder if Russia can be perceived as anything other than a threat by Eastern European countries.

FOREIGN POLICY AS DISTRACTION

The search for an external enemy is a classic way of distracting from internal political problems. After the chaotic 1990s, Putin was not able to diversify the Russian economy and, most importantly, modernize it. In contrast, some of the other countries of the former Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact succeeded in doing so. If Ukraine had been able to achieve similar successes, shortfalls in Russia would have become increasingly apparent. Ever-increasing

bureaucracy, corruption, and politically influenced judiciary only reinforce the outflow of foreign capital from Russia.

As the economic situation grows more precarious and dissatisfaction among the population increases, the more Moscow needs to reinforce control. This is especially evident in the oppression of the political opposition, such as in the cases of Kremlin critic Vladimir Kara-Mursa (who has been poisoned for a second time), Alexei Navalny (who was convicted in a controversial trial in 2017 and thus prevented from competing as a presidential candidate in 2018), or, most notably, Boris Nemtsov (who was shot dead in February 2015). Meanwhile, external "threats", such as NATO, the United States, non-governmental organizations, political foundations, and critical foreign media, are being used as a means to divert attention away from domestic problems and to seek the enemy elsewhere.

I believe with all my heart that European peace and prosperity is worth defending.

GERMANY'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The aim of the Russian disinformation campaign is to discredit democratically elected governments and to disrupt and divide the public. The Kremlin is spending a lot of money on this endeavor. The contemporary self-understanding of European liberal democracies simply does not permit countermeasures through propaganda.

The EU, NATO, and their member states are in agreement about this.

Hence, it is especially necessary to take firm action against Russian misinformation through fact-based counter arguments. This applies to the EU and NATO, as well as to their individual member states. As early as 2015, the EU established the East StratCom Task Force, based in Brussels, which collects Russian fake news items and lists them online. In 2014, NATO established the Center of Excellence for Strategic Communication in Riga, in order to assist NATO member states in refuting Russian disinformation campaigns.

Bearing all this in mind, it seems evident that Germany will have to prepare itself for the upcoming months. The Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), to which I belong and whose chairperson is German Chancellor Angela Merkel, is planning to strengthen public service broadcasting. This particularly includes *Deutsche Welle* abroad, in order to build a counterweight to Russian propaganda.

Germany was targeted by the Kremlin much later than other European states, as Moscow hoped to sway Germany to its side during the Ukraine crisis. The Kremlin clearly underestimated the joint U.S.-EU commitment to impose

sanctions on Russia after the annexation of Crimea. The German chancellor played a crucial role in keeping the ranks of the West united. As a result, Chancellor Merkel and the democratic parties in Germany have now become a target of disinformation and destabilization attempts. This became especially obvious after a cyberattack on the German Bundestag servers in the summer of 2015, and after a fake news story went public about an ethnic Russian girl being allegedly sexually abused by refugees in Berlin in early 2016.

In the coming weeks and months, the public must be particularly cautious of when and how Moscow will try to split German society, discredit

the country's democratic parties, and support anti-Western parties on the far right of our political spectrum.

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Against this backdrop, I would like to see more commitment and education from the government, as well as particularly active engagement by the German media and the German public. United,

level-headed, and strictly based on facts, we will be able to maintain our liberal, democratic values in the long term. These values have created unparalleled prosperity in Europe and given Europe an unprecedented peace that has been lasting for more than 70 years. I believe with all my heart that European peace and prosperity is worth defending. ●

Jeremić's Commencement Address to the Italian Diplomatic Academy

In one of the world's most preserved Roman amphitheaters, the Arena of Verona, CIRSD President **Vuk Jeremić** delivered a keynote commencement address on 28 May 2017 to the graduating class of the Italian Diplomatic Academy.

Before an audience of several thousand, Jeremić said that as President of the UN General Assembly, he was honored to have launched the historic negotiations that led to the establishment of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which he characterized as "a new form of cooperation on a planetary scale." But, he added, "we're not moving fast enough on the SDGs. Less than two years after clear implementation timelines were established, we've already fallen behind."

Jeremić attributed the increasing reticence to move forward on the agreed global framework to the resurgence of populist movements around the world. "Populism is both seductive and toxic," he said. "It is *seductive* because it conveniently simplifies issues and claims easy solutions are right around the corner; it is *toxic* because it scapegoats and divides, while failing to deliver on the



hyperbolic promises made at the spur of the moment.

Jeremić explained that populism is "particularly seductive at a moment of profound global change—like the one we live in—because it targets those who feel disadvantaged by the rapid pace of social and technological innovation."