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## Can Europe be saved?

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Rocco Buttiglione

## *Can Europe be saved?*

Rocco Buttiglione w eseju *Czy Europa może być zbawiona?* prezentuje Unię Europejską jako piękny zamek z antycznymi malowidłami, ale... bez dachu. Obraz ten oddaje sytuację UE, która powołała wiele wspólnych instytucji i polityk, ale wciąż nie stworzyła unii politycznej, będącej warunkiem ich prawidłowego funkcjonowania. Autor ukazuje, m.in. poprzez odwołanie do przykładu Unii Walutowej czy Wspólnej Polityki Obronnej, że pytanie o chrześcijańskie korzenie Europy nie jest pytaniem abstrakcyjnym i wprost wiąże się z możliwościami powołania unii politycznej. Broni tezy, iż możliwość odrodzenia projektu integracji europejskiej zależy od tego kim jesteśmy i jak siebie pojmujemy; ostatecznie zależy od naszej gotowości traktowania innych jako naszych braci, co jest niemożliwe bez chrześcijańskiej inspiracji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Europa, korzenie kulturowe, Unia Europejska, chadecja, kryzys

Rocco Buttiglione presents the European Union as a beautiful castle with ancient tapestries and beautiful paintings but without a roof and ceiling. As the author notes, we have created many common institutions and policies but a Political Union, which is a fundamental condition for their proper functioning, is still missing. The author shows, inter alia by using example of Monetary Union and Defense Policy, that the question of the Christian roots is not abstract but it is closely related to that problem. He defends the thesis that the possibility of revitalization of the European integration project and – especially – of the Political Union depends on who we are and on the consciousness we have of ourselves; in the end it depends on our readiness to treat others as our brothers, which is impossible without Christian inspiration.

**Keywords:** Europe, cultural roots, European Union, Christian democracy, crisis

Europe resembles today a beautiful castle with ancient tapestries and beautiful paintings hanging from the walls, artistic peaces of furniture decorating the great halls, spacious and well fitted kitchens and all desirable comforts. Only roof and ceiling are missing. When it rains it rains within and after a while the humidity melts the pigments of the paintings and the colors of the tapestries, the plaster of the walls comes off, the wood furniture swells and breaks and after a while everything is in ruins. We had a great project for Europe but this project was not completed and as a consequence it has begun to dissolve. Can it be saved? Yes, if we find women and men of courage and wisdom: wisdom to see what needs to be done and courage to implement the needed measures.

In the years when the European project was developed Europe was to the peoples of Central Europe an object of hope, but the main responsibility of conforming the new Europe lay with the western countries, those that were already within the structures of the European Union. Today it is different. You, the Polish people, have a full responsibility for the future of Europe. It is not enough that we ask ourselves if Europe is still the object of our political hope. We must answer also another and more difficult question. Are you willing to be the carriers of the European hope? If you want to find the women and men who can save Europe do not look for them far away in distant lands, look around yourselves and look within yourselves. Are you those women and men of wisdom and courage? Are you, are you willing to be, in an act of free obedience to the spirit, the hope of Europe?

### **Is it worth the while to save Europe?**

Before we make further progress along this line of thought there is a preliminary question that needs to be answered. Is it worth the while to save this Europe? Some voices in many European countries say that it is not.

In countries like Greece or Spain or Portugal or Italy many people criticize the European Union because it does not allow us to increase our already huge public debt, to increase the public expenditures and to refloat in this way our staggering economies. They forget that the real reason why we should not accumulate further debt is not the preoccupation for the reprimands of the European Commission, but the simple fact that the markets will not make us credit and will not buy any more our treasure bonds. We would be compelled to declare bankrupt. The reprimands of the Commission are just a warning: Beware of the Dog. We stop not because of the warning, but because of the dog.

In countries like Germany there is a different and opposite syndrome. Many people say: these European Union wants us to spend too much of our precious money to support the faltering economies of our weaker neighbors. If they cannot keep pace with us let us part our ways. They forget that that is the way to recreate the conditions for a German Empire first and for the European War later.

Some, especially in Poland, say: we do not like this Europe that incenses a so called „culture of rights” in which abortion is a right and life is not, in which the great values of our Judeo-Christian and classical heritage are not cherished and the word God is no more pronounced. They forget that this is the only Europe we have. We can struggle to build up a better Europe but we cannot take refuge to another Europe that does not exist any more

and perhaps never really existed. If we leave Europe where shall we go? The simple truth is that we are Europeans and cannot deny our identity.

Europe is made of a great variety of different national characters and cultures. A pole is different from a German and both are different from a Frenchman or an Italian. It is good so and it will not change. If you however watch to us, to the Europeans, from a different perspective, if you compare us with peoples belonging to other families of cultures, than you discover striking similarities in the value that is given to human life, in the way in which the relation between men and women is conceived, in the attitude in front of violence...

I shall not say that our distinctive human values belong only to us. In the end all families of human cultures converge in the human culture that is one as man is one. Human culture is however a symphony and without the European contribution something essential would be missing.

The economic and political landscape around us, moreover, is rapidly changing. New countries and new concentrations of world power are growing while others are diminishing and others still might fade out altogether. A new division of labor, accompanied by a global redistribution of power and wealth, is taking place in the world. Some poor countries are becoming rich, some countries that used to be wealthy might become poor. It is enough to glance an eye on the statistics of world economy to see that Italy is no more one of the eight largest economies of the world and has virtually forfeited its place in this most exclusive club whose role for world global governance is destined to increase manifold in the coming years. And France? And Great Britain? How long will they defend their position among the top ranking economies of the world? Until 2020? A bit longer? Sure not until 2050. And Germany? Germany also, „although it seems so firm to us” will not last among the 8 economic major powers until 2050. The XXI century belongs to China, to India, to Brazil and also to Russia, to Mexico and to Indonesia. Whether it belongs to Europe we do not know. Left alone, each one by himself, we will not be able to have our voices heard where the crucial decisions will be taken. All together we will be one of the major players of the new world order, one of the big threes at the same level with USA and China. If we want to defend our values and our legitimate interests in the coming century we better stick together. If we do not we might easily be the losers of globalization.

### **The Euro is not working well**

One of the pillars of our European system is the common currency and the institutions and regulations that support it. It is only fair to say that on occasion of the current crisis it did

not work well. We had errors of political leadership and we could clearly see weak spots in our institutional framework.

***a) Errors of political Leadership***

All begun with Greece. The Greek government had cheated with the Union and had accumulated an unbearable public debt. Greece had been consuming for a long while more than it produced. When all this became apparent the world speculation attacked Greece and pretended usurer's interest rates to refinance the Greek public debt. The world speculation was further incensed because they saw Greece as the weak link in the chain of the euro. They hoped to be able to force Greece to leave the common currency. If this had happened Greece could easily be followed by Ireland, and Portugal, and Spain and... Greece stood in dire need of help and Greece deserved to be punished.

The European Union should have said since the beginning: we will defend Greece (and the euro) at all costs. Beware: if you risk your money in a speculation against Greece (and the euro) you will lose it. We know the Greeks deserve to be punished and we will mete out to them the punishment they deserve, but put your hands off from Greece, don't you dare touching one hair of her head.

On the contrary we said: we will not pay with the money of our taxpayers the debts of the Greeks. It was an open invitation to the world speculation to tear Greece apart and this is what they did. The Greeks received a punishment that went much beyond their sins. Only later we all realized that the collapse of Greece would have had dramatic consequences for our (mainly French and German) banks exposed to Greece and for our companies that make all sort of business with Greece. While we still think and speak in terms of Germany and Poland, Italy or Greece as if they were separate entities as a matter of fact these economies are interwoven with one another in such a way that any damage done in one part of the tissue of European economy has painful and even dramatic consequences for the whole. In the end Greece was rescued but at a financial cost of the operation much higher than it could have been if we had unambiguously contrasted the speculation since the beginning. And in the meanwhile Greece had to suffer an horrible social crisis. We lacked solidarity and in the end it resulted in this as in many other cases that solidarity is not only noble but also useful and the cleverest policy.

***b) Weak Spots in our institutional Framework***

The financial crisis set off a latent economic crisis. If you compare our rates of growth with those of the emerging countries it becomes apparent that we are becoming less and less

competitive. We need a common economic policy that we do not have. We need a strong program of investments to enhance our productivity and lead us into the new economy of knowledge. Now the Junker Commission is taking some steps in this direction. This is positive but not sufficient. We need a common economic policy but we cannot have a common economic policy if we do not have a European Political Union.

The Political Union is the roof that is missing in our Europe. We have tried to substitute for the Political Union a system of fixed parameters regarding the budget deficit (no more than 3% of GDP), the national debt (close to 60% of GDP), etc... It is all very reasonable but it is like to point the bow of the boat to port and then to tie the helm. If the weather is good and the wind blows to port all goes well. But if the weather turns bad and the wind gets crazy then you have to untie the rudder and sail tacking. What is the reason why USA are sorting out of the crisis sooner and in a better shape than we do? Because they have the political power to make decisions, because they are the United States of America and we are the Disunited States of Europe. The decisions that we take, moreover, cannot be left to the bureaucracy of Brussels, highly competent and full of good intentions but completely devoid of democratic legitimacy.

The euro was a part of a broader project that encompassed the creation of a Political Union. It cannot work without the support of a Political Union.

### **We need a common Defense Policy...**

Since we have not a Political Union we cannot have a common Defense Policy and we tremble when we hear the rattling of swords coming from the Ukraine. Russia has less than one third the population of the European Union and little more than 10% our GNP.

According to all estimates we spend on defense more between twice and three times the amount spent by Russia and over 30%. When Russia seized Crimea, however, we felt utterly impotent and defenseless and Barack Obama had to come here, to Warsaw, to reassure the countries on the Eastern border of the Union that they could and would be defended against any possible aggression. We spend over 30% of the military expenditure of United States but we do not have 30% of their military power. Why is it so? The reason is simple and easy to understand. With our money we support 28 military bureaucracies while the United States pay for only one. We have not a unified system for the procurement of weapons and other goods needed the the armed services and this implies an enormous increase of the comparative costs. And in case of need we do not have a unified command and control system that enables us to coordinate our reaction unless we make use of the NATO system, that

is unless we act under the guidance of the United States. Now President Obama is urging our countries to spend more on defense. Isn't it better to make a better use of the money we already spend constituting a Common European Defense System? Some think that we do not really need it since in case of need the Americans will take care of our defense. In the past this was the case but will this hold true in the future?

Immediately after the Second World War the United States disposed of 50% of the world GDP and they could give guarantees of security and peace both in the Atlantic and in the Pacific. In this century the United States will remain the major economic and military power but the distance between them and the others will be much less. They have now 20% of the world's economic output. Is it enough to give the needed guarantees both in the Pacific and in the Atlantic? The demographic, economic and political CG (Center of Gravity) of American life, moreover, is moving fast from the Atlantic towards the Pacific. It is not so sure that in the future the Americans will be able to take care of our security as they did in the past. It remains true, however, that we share with the United States fundamental values and a common vision. What we really need is not a decoupling of our security from that of United States but rather a new alliance between the United States and the European Union within a renewed Atlantic Community. The European Union controls another 20% of the world output. Together we have the force to defend our values and legitimate interests and to give a decisive contributions to the guidance of world affairs in the XXI century. This is the reason why the Commercial Treaty that is being discussed now between Europe and the United States should be more than just a Commercial Treaty. It should be a cornerstone of the new world order of the coming century.

But we cannot have a Common Defense Policy and we cannot be an equal partner of United States if we have not a Political Unity.

### **...and a Common Foreign Policy**

In the end and with the help of United States we succeeded in stemming the thrust of Putin's Russia in the Ukraine (or at least it seems so now). Is that enough? We must say to Putin: keep your hands off the Ukraine. That is fine but is that all?

We need a common policy towards Russia, a policy that tells them that in our Europe there is a honorable place for them too. In this last decade they have felt isolated, marginalized and fundamentally rejected. Putin's new Russian imperialism is the result of this feeling of frustration and of the resulting sentiment of revanche. Russia needs us to resume its route towards democracy. Russia needs us to develop its economy. Russia covers about 17 mil-

lions square kilometers of the surface of the earth with only about 149 millions inhabitants, mainly concentrated west of the Ural. Although an obsessive propaganda keeps telling us that we are too many on this earth, the naked truth is that a large part of the earth is uninhabited and in Siberia there are only 40 million people for 13 millions square kilometers. There is enormous agricultural, mineral, energetic wealth that can be exploited only with the help of the European Union. Russia needs us. And we need Russia. Russia belongs to our culture. Some great archetypes of our common, European culture were developed by Russian minds and belong to the European spirit. Think of Piotr Bezuchov in *War and Peace* or of Sonia Marmeladova in *Crime and Punishment*. And a strong and growing Russian economy would bolster also the growth of our economy helping us to overcome the sluggishness of these last years. John Paul II used to say that Europe breathes with two lungs, the Western and the Eastern ones, the Eastern one being Russia. We must have a Common Foreign Policy towards Russia but we cannot have any Common Foreign Policy if we are not a Political Union.

### **The Enlargement was a Success...**

Another pillar of the political project of the '90 was the Enlargement. In one sense it was a clear success against overwhelming odds. I remember, for instance, the great preoccupation dominating Poland just before the referendum on the accession of Poland to the European Union in June 2003. Many asked: can our industry survive the competition with the Germans, with the French, with the British who are much stronger than us? What will happen to our agriculture, to our peasants with their still backward technologies, in an open competition with the Western countries? Three quarters of Polish electors voted for Europe. They were right. Polish economy has bloomed. The visitor landing today in Warsaw Airport is struck by the bold vitality of Polish economy and this impression becomes even stronger when he makes a comparison with the Poland of yesterday or if we consider the fact that Poland has kept growing in the years of the great European recession in 2009 and later. An economic success but a political failure. Why?

### **But we failed the Reunification of Europe**

The European project did not want just an enlargement but rather a reunification of Europe. Enlargement means that qualitatively Western Europe was already Europe and the enlargement implies merely a quantitative extension of the already existing system. Reunification means that only together we are really Europe and when the countries of Central Europe were under the communist rule something was missing to our European identity. In front of communism we have had two different spiritual strategies among the western intellectuals and in the interior opposition.

To the Western intellectuals communism was a ideological force that pretended the possession of the science of history. Those who possess absolute truth are not likely to respect the rights of those who disagree. Absolute relativism seemed to be the ideology of democracy against totalitarianism. Absolute relativism went hand in hand with a consumerist society that was more materialist than communism. At the end of the day the object of the criticism was not just communism but the very idea of truth.

To the opposition in Poland as well as in the other communist countries communism was not first of all not an ideology but a factual power. The ruling elite did not believe in communism. They did believe in their own power. Their society was a post-totalitarian society. This spiritual constellation has been analyzed by Vaclav Havel in his booklet *The Power of the Powerless*. Communist authorities required compliance with the dictates of ideology only to compel the citizens that it was not worth the while to defy power in the name of truth. More accurately we could say not just that power is more important than truth but that power makes truth. Against this post-totalitarian ideology the opposition rediscovers truth as the basis of democracy, as the driving force of an individual and social witness. The spiritual attitude is opposite to that of the European, Western intellectuals. They ones make of absolute relativism, the others make of the idea of truth the philosophy of democracy.

### **We left the Memory of the European values rediscovered in the Struggle for Freedom out of the Constitution**

The idea of truth is not only Christian. It grounds also the whole intellectual tradition of Europe. Jan Patočka and Stanislaw Grygiel both rediscover in Plato and in his idea of truth the basis of our ethos and the adequate justification of the struggle against power when power is not based on truth.

The decision not to mention Christian values in the Constitution implied a refuse to take into account the Polish experience, to incorporate it within a common European consciousness. I do not say that that experience had to be considered as canonical to the exclusion of all others. A Constitution is a political document, not a philosophical essay. It can name contradictory elements that are felt as equally essential for our common self consciousness, leaving to a further free cultural and political discussion the exact determination of their relation to one another or their possible synthesis. Not to mention the Christian values in the Constitution meant to say: we do not consider your experience as European, we refuse to let our conscience be questioned by all what you have experienced and lived through in your struggle for freedom and for Europe.

The result of the struggle on Christian values was not the affirmation of a different spiritual basis. In the end we had no values in the Constitution for the very simple reason that we have had no Constitution. We have had and we have not a Constitution but a Treaty, a system of norms on the functioning of the different bodies of the European institutions that are not founded on the recognition of a common value fundament and the dialogue on values has been marginalized from our common European self consciousness. This self consciousness hangs in the void, in an empty space.

### **Are we or can we become a European Demos**

Several years ago Lord Ralph Dahrendorf doubted the possibility of a European Political Union saying that we do not have an European “demos” (“people” in Greek). We have not a common language, a common public opinion, common national prejudices and sentiments. How can we have a democratic political representation of a people that does not exist? The objection must be taken very seriously. If it is true that European people do not exist than a European Union cannot be democratic, and if the force of things draws it towards the unity then this unity can be governed only by a technocracy and not by a democracy. By the way this seems to be the path along which we all are walking.

I answered lord Ralph saying that demos is not a biological concept. The biological unity, in Greek, is the “ethne” (tribe). The demos belongs neither to biology nor to nature but rather to the culture and is the result of a human decision. One day the inhabitants of the villages around the Acropolis in Attica decided to build one community and to go to live together (in Greek “sun oikein”). So they founded the city of Athens. In the center of the city was the temple to the goddess who gave her name to the city and all the new citizens shared a common myth on their common origin. The real problem is not whether a European demos does or does not exist. The real problem is whether we want or do not want to make it exist, if we take the responsibility for it. The odds are great but not insuperable. Is language an unsurpassable obstacle? Romulus united in the primitive foundation of Roma three tribes: the Ramnes (who were Latins), the Titii (who were Sabins) and the Luceres (who were Etruscans). They spoke different languages but they wanted to be citizens of the same city and they became citizens of the same city. The Greeks called all this with the word “synechism”, the choice and the act of going to live together. It is an act dependent on the will and constitutes also a wager, a challenge to the future. The problem is: are we willing to face this challenge? and what is the alternative? The problem is not Europe but the globalization. Does anybody really think that we can better face the dangers of an uncertain tomorrow alone and not together?

But we will not have a city in common if we will not have a sanctuary, a common place of worship, the conviction of having a common ancestor (a cultural, not a biological one) that makes of us a band of brothers. Not by chance the European Anthem. “The Ode to Joy”, sings: “Brothers, beyond the starry vault of the sky; There must be a Father who loves us”. Schiller knew what “synechism” means. We have built no sanctuary and as a consequence our unity was fragile and our solidarity too weak to resist the hardships of the crisis. Why should a German be willing to make sacrifices for the Greeks or why should an Englishman or an Italian be ready to die for Gdansk? Schiller gives a very simple and straightforward answer: because we are brothers. But: do we want to be brothers? And can we be brothers if we have no common roots, if we do not have a father who loves us and makes us brothers? The question of the Christian roots is not so abstract and far from the concrete problems of the political everyday life as some imagine. What we do depends on what we are and on the consciousness we have of ourselves.

**Rocco Buttiglione**, włoski filozof i polityk, profesor nauk politycznych na Uniwersytecie Św. Piusa V w Rzymie, deputowany Parlamentu Włoch. Założyciel Międzynarodowej Akademii Filozofii w Lichtensteinie. W toku działalności politycznej sprawował m.in. funkcje ministra do spraw polityki wspólnotowej rządu Republiki Włoch, deputowanego i senatora Parlamentu Włoch, deputowanego Parlamentu Europejskiego. W Polsce opublikował m.in.: *Chrześcijaństwo a demokracja*, Lublin 1993 oraz *Etyka w kryzysie*, Lublin 1994.