

Europe's Destiny: The Old Lady and the Bull

By Attila Marjan

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Scholars and politicians debating the future of Europe usually fall into two camps. There are the Euro-enthusiasts, claiming that Brussels – backed by a strong single market and an increasingly harmonious Union – has a bright future. And the Euro-skeptics, declaring that the days of European progress are gone and that the continent is bound to helplessly watch how the winners of globalization steal its global influence. The view that Europe lacks vision and is in deep political and economic trouble, is *en vogue* – and flourishing not only in Washington and Beijing, but in Brussels itself. Current trends indeed cause concern. Europe is the world's slowest-growing region, its budgets are strained, and its population is aging at an alarming pace. Euro-enthusiasts counter, arguing that the EU's population is still larger than that of the U.S. and Russia combined, and it is the world's biggest trading bloc and largest single market. So, what is Europe – an economically stagnant 'continent of the past' or an evolving global power?

In his recently published book *Europe's Destiny: the Old Lady and the Bull*, Attila Marjan claims to avoid the simplified dichotomies of Euro-skepticism and -enthusiasm. Instead, he aims at providing a realistic assessment of the challenges Europe faces and to present ways out of the malaise. His overall tone is pessimistic, as exemplified by the allegory of his book's subtitle: Europe resembles "a fragile old lady," (1) threatened by the "bull" – a symbol for the new world order of globalization. "The center of the globalized world has shifted

elsewhere," Marjan writes, "while the 'old continent' finds itself abandoned and deserted, watching the world speed by and brooding over its past glory." (16) The author finds that Europe faces a complex and disquieting set of challenges, not only regarding its own institutional structure, its internal market, and its social model, but also concerning its global competitiveness in a changing geopolitical order.

Marjan affirms that growing international competition and the improving performance of emerging economic powers hamper Europe's standing in the global markets, its productivity and its economic growth. Unless it is able to refocus its exports on the most dynamic regions and high-technology sectors, Europe will be marginalized in world trade. Another menace, looming larger than China or India, is that of aging. Europe is "sitting on a demographic and pension time bomb" (11) – whereas currently, there are four active workers paying for every retiree, this ratio will have dropped to one to two by 2050. This shrinking of the workforce is disastrous in an era where emerging powers and with them billions of new workers seek a place in the global economy. Due to its aging society, Europe's growth potential is cut by half, growing health and social care costs put national budgets under strain, and financing the current pension system is impossible.

Marjan's major argument, therefore, is that Europe's social model – the welfare state built on the rapid growth and prosperity of the postwar years – is unsustainable

in the long term and hampers the EU's international competitiveness. This is because it encourages a phenomenon the author calls "post-productivism" – a weakening of "people's motivation to work, compete, and fight." (182) "All these factors contribute to a rigid, self-absorbed mentality, a Europe closing itself off from the world and suspicious of change, which is the seedbed of protectionism." (131) Marjan considers increased protection and isolationism as tantamount to economic suicide. His enemies are economists like Joseph E. Stiglitz or Paul Krugman – who, in times of economic recession and financial crises, call for limited leverage, the protection of consumers, and more regulation.

The irony is that Marjan published his book in a time when the world is recovering from a global financial crisis – and when Europeans have every reason to believe that their criticism of the Anglo-Saxon economic model is justified. Instead of showing ways how both the European model of solidarity and its economic sustainability can be preserved, the author demands an Americanization of the EU's economic model – a move away from formalized institutions of social dialogue, towards individualism, free market competition, and, overall, a less government intervention. It is one of the major weaknesses of Marjan's book that, despite its claim to find ways out of the crisis, it aims to reinforce the very economic concepts, which caused the current financial crisis in the first place.

Marjan rightly argues that the European Union is "the manifestation of globalization in Europe" (34), a "libertarian universe built on the four freedoms" (67). But this is only one part of the story. The European single market, though reinforcing liberalization, is at the same time a protective shield *against*

globalization – a way to keep capitalism at bay and give it a benign face. Thus, the 'European model' is more than an excessive and overprotective welfare state stimulating long holidays, short working hours, and early retirement – it is a social model with a high degree of responsibility for the protection of the living standards and inclusion of all of its citizens. This is what differentiates Europe from the U.S. and, indeed, from most of the rest of the world.

Another flaw of the book is Marjan's writing style. His prose, with its frequent personifications and allegories, might appear lively at the beginning. But after the tenth discussion of 'European onions' and 'European Christmas trees', 'Miss Social Justices', 'hermaphrodites' and 'old ladies' riding 'raging bulls', one cannot help but wishing that the author had reduced the repetitive and figurative nature of his language.

Overall, *Europe's Destiny* is a useful introductory study for students who would like to get a broad overview of the profoundness and variety of problems Europe faces. But the apparent advantage of the book is also its major weakness. *Europe's Destiny* aims at explaining almost everything: China, India, the Middle East, international trade, terrorism, energy, immigration, environment, development aid, climate change, the Constitutional Treaty, the EU's enlargement – and it ends up not explaining much. Even though Marjan makes a unique and successful attempt to show the different, multilayered dilemmas and crises Europe faces, he himself seems to be overwhelmed by the multitude of problems. Thus, he is unable to structure his analysis coherently, to point out those challenges that really matter, and to give new answers to the many questions he poses.

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