

The Future of Europe

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Today it seems to be one of the most traditional and trivial, because so often repeated and therefore even literally boring, things to say about Europe that it is in a state of crisis. Since its very conception, this seemed to be the case. And because it appears rather to be a natural condition of Europe, one may immediately wonder if a permanent and perpetual state of crisis is still and should still be called a crisis? Is a crisis still a crisis when everyone got used to it and expects nothing else, nothing less or more precisely: nothing more? One could assume that if something is permanently in ruins and people start to inhabit the ruins as if they were the only imaginable living vicinities, they simply get used to the ruins, as they do not seem to change anyhow. After a (often rather short) while what appeared to be broken at first, ultimately appears to be the only imaginable state of the world. The crisis then would not be a crisis, but the very name of the structure of Europe, of its real constitution. And if the crisis in Europe could be said to be structural in this sense, if Europe thus could be said to have a crisis-structure, as paradoxical as this may sound, the crisis would in another words just be (the new and maybe already old) normal for Europe. Europe by being in a state of permanent crisis, would not be in a crisis, it would just be Europe.

Yet, what would one do with such a diagnosis? One option is to assume that the crisis that is Europe therefore does need to reach a new level of intensity to become really (visible and felt as) what it is, to become truly apparent as crisis. If it reached the highest crisis-state yet, things and structures may change and maybe then everything will finally fall into the right place, so that a change for the better becomes possible. The crisis that is Europe must, this would be the assumption, become so radical that one cannot accept it as normality any longer. Where the structural collapse lies, there also grows the true European saving power. The true catastrophicity, to use this neologism, of the crisis would force everyone out of their European comfort zone. But this assumption, shared by some on the left as well as on the right, appears to be just another version of a metaphysical hope - a hope that things ultimately will turn to the better, a hope that crystallizes in the belief that things just need to get really bad, so that they can then finally turn to the best. That we are dealing with metaphysics here already becomes apparent in the difficulty to determine the moment, the point when and where we finally and actually reach this ultimate crisis-peak. Will everyone immediately know and be able to identify this moment? Will the phenomena themselves tell us (and will we easily be able to understand)? How will we be able to recognize it - is there method in catastrophe?

As to now, everything seems crisis-business as usual - even though there are increasing symptoms everywhere that the current state of the crisis might be a particular and special one - but this may be the trick with a crisis-structure that everything seems to be particularly bad and nothing ever is bad enough to truly change things. Maybe because things being bad never per se changes any-thing. So, does the current state of

the crisis present us just another version of the same-old? Maybe another layer of regression that does not change anything and appears as if it were the (old and new) normal? What if there is a tendency or practice of normalizing things not being bad, but even getting worse? Or does this indicate, as Walter Benjamin noticed almost a hundred years ago, that “suspicious views from afar [verdächtigen Fernblicke]” see in Europe and European culture “not much more... than its nameless endangerment?” Maybe Europe is nothing more than and exists today only as the threat of its own disappearance? To answer this question it is instructive to take a look at the current crisis manifestations, at Europe’s symptoms. What are those symptoms?

One can certainly think of the ongoing turmoil produced by and around the so-called refugees, i.e. the refugee-crisis² that remains a determining political factor in the current state of affairs (it determines and overshadows inter alia the present relation of the European Union to its some of its members, members such as Greece or Malta that suddenly are forced to or voluntarily accept to take over a very particular function, it also created a particular political situation in which right-wing parties significantly gained in most member states of the EU electoral grounds, but it also generated an external determining effect concerning the (in) dependence of the EU vis-a-vis some of its closest neighbors, consider for example the EU’s relationship with Turkey and Turkey’s role in stopping the refugee-“flow”). The refugee(-symptom)-crisis is bound together with further symptoms: the perpetuated politics of austerity measures (that is certainly not applied everywhere, but where it “must” be). It is also bound together with the silent economic politics of weapon trade between influential member states of the EU and extra-European countries that limit the strategic and political options of the EU in certain and quite significant areas in advance - as if economic growth and gain cannot but produce political castration and incapacitation. And it certainly has a connection with the already mentioned rise of the far-right movements and parties throughout Europe, too, and their consequences (as in all the exit-“movements”).

It is not at all our intention to attempt here or in the following to present a complete list of symptoms of the current crisis(-structure) of the EU or Europe in general. Yet, we deem it interesting to note that these symptoms are often or mostly treated and represented as if they are problems caused by external circumstances outside of the EU, as if the crisis they seem to be indicating is a crisis that does not have any bearing on, pertinence, or significance for the very structure of the EU at all. The situation is thus peculiar: on the hand hand side it seems we have

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1 Walter Benjamin, “Drei Bücher: Viktor Schlowiski - Alfred Polgar - Julien Benda”, in: Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 3, 113, our translation, FR/AH.

2 Krecic 2017

a structure of a collective of states that is almost indistinguishable from a crisis; on the other hand side this very collective treats the crisis as something that strangely remains external to it and does not belong to it.

Yet, it seems that there is also an increasing number of people who appear to believe that these symptoms are actually only an indication, a by-product, maybe a necessary or even disorienting one, something like a collateral effect of a more profound trembling of European political foundations. And this is certainly what up till now mainly the right was able to translate into novel reactionary political agendas. But does this impression change the situation? The answer to this question strongly depends on what we think the just mentioned foundations are. Does the EU have a solid political framework and is it just struggling in a globalized world against the sudden, irrational and groundless eruption of the blind multi-faceted forces of capital from under the veneer of conciliatory financial negotiations? Or might the EU itself just be one of these forces or even symptoms? For, what is actually this “Europe” that we were referring to in the syntagm “Europe is in a crisis”? In most discourses, from the one we encounter in the media to what nowadays is called “political” discussions, even those within the EU, the difference between Europe and the EU is silently, even though rarely explicitly present. The EU does clearly exist - even if in a rather weak state of health -, but does Europe exist? And if (not), what does it want (as Slavoj Zizek actualized the famous Freudian question already years ago)?

Is the EU, as has often been claimed, the embodiment of a general and far reaching mutation of politics into technocratic management? Is this what was and is at stake when speaking about the relation between Europe and the EU - the survival or rather the very existence of politics? Are these symptoms actually pointing and embodying not only a crisis of the EU but rather a crisis, or the potential return of (the crisis) of politics? Or are we dealing with symptoms of an a-politicization?

The many questions - and maybe there are only questions - of and in the present introduction all emphasize that with this issue of “Crisis and Critique” we want to examine if there is still something unfulfilled, a promise or potential in the very concept or idea of Europe that can be mobilized or is at least worth thinking and working through. Maybe this answer(s) will be negative. But maybe, just maybe, we are not condemned to remain within an interpretation of the current European condition that forces us to accept the given boundaries of what is referred to as European politics and whose agent is mostly identified as the European Union. What if Europe were an idea? But if so, would it be worth fighting for? What would such a struggle would look like (conceptually and politically) and who would we be fighting it? If it were an idea Europe would have to be different from the complex trade complex that facilitates capital circulation. But to say more about this different Europe one would have to say something about what might be able to generate a mobilizing power beyond and apart from what seems

politically possible and opportune in the present situation. But all this is an old hat, an old problem. Since, at least within European philosophy Europe has been the name for a “problem” for a long time. But we raise this old and often raised, almost boring question in a specific historical conjuncture in which Europe stands today. Since this today does not present the “problem” that is Europe only with internal and local, structural and localizable problems. So, the problematic nature of Europe does not spring from internal European problems, referred or alluded to before. Rather - and maybe this might also not be per se a novelty - the European problems are today clearly problems of and on a global scale. Foreign powers are, even if hostile to one another, strangely united in their opposition and enmity toward Europe - a fact that is also often immanently represented in their repeated (think of Bannon and others) support of far-right forces in Europe, supporting the dissolution of the European Union. If a situation seems to complex or multi-layered, to convoluted or disorienting, it helps to introduce clear lines of demarcation and clear-cut distinctions. The task is sometimes not to make things more complex, but to simplify.

The present issue starts from such a simplifying assumption – an assumption that must be verified and can certainly also be falsified. This assumption is that all of the current (crisis-)symptoms are(in) direct effects and results of the crisis and lack of any international(ist) emancipatory vision linked to the signifier “Europe”; to the impotence, if one wishes, of the Left in Europe. How to combat this crisis under the present conditions and under the conditions in Europe? The present issue of “Crisis and Critique” will certainly contribute to answering this question.

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