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What next for the Peaceful Power? Europe and the search for an International Role.

They said it could never be done.

It would be impossible for the great powers of Europe to come together in peaceful association after centuries of conflict. The French would not trust the Germans, the Poles would never agree to a demilitarised western border and anyway, without a common language the whole experiment would be doomed to failure from the start. But half a century later the dream has become reality. It is today impossible to imagine the German army contemplating the conquest of Belgium or the French attempting to once again take the British crown. Europe has enjoyed more peace for more people for longer than at any point in the past 500 years and Fins, Maltese, Portuguese and Latvians find themselves committed to a common project of understanding and positive cross-cultural interaction.

In coming years the European Union will see further enlargements in the east and, perhaps, even into Turkey, a development that would bring yet another of the world's great empires into communion with its former imperial rivals. With the accession of the current candidate countries to the wider Union, Europe will stand as a continent of calm, a truly peaceful power stretching across borders that once ran red with the blood of war. So it is now that Europe is posed a question every bit as important as those it responded to in building the democratic community that exists today: what to do next? This short paper will suggest three areas where Europe will not only need to take an international role but will be forced to do so.

First, Europe will soon be forced to take a larger role in world policing and securing freedom for all of the people of the world. While Europe has been spectacularly successful in creating a peaceful Europe for Europeans, many regions of the globe still exist in conditions of conflict that might best be described as from the Middle Ages. Continuing conflict leads to much-reduced life expectancies for African and Asian peoples, child soldiers fight against other children for political ends they could not possibly understand and tyrannical dictators rule with the authority of life and death once only ascribed to kings. Europe must join with its democratic allies and put people on the ground who are willing to fight and, if needs be, die for the values and way of life that should be the birthright of every man, woman and child. Doing so, however, will require a change in attitude by the European Union from an outlook which works hard to secure peace among former rivals on a single continent to one that looks beyond borders to the world and fights for the rights of those for whom it legally owes nothing. The people and politicians will have to change their outlook from one in which the death of any soldier in a foreign conflict is too high a price to pay for change to one where such deaths are regrettable and horrible but, in the end, necessary to save the lives of not fellow-countrymen but fellow-human beings. Europe will not be able to sit out another Rwanda, another Somalia or another Iraq: Europe will be forced to take a larger portion of the global security burden if human rights are to be delivered to all.

Secondly, it will be essential for the EU to make it clear where it stands in the great power rivalry that many in the world see as integral to the future safety and security of the planet: the rivalry between the United States and China. Europe's current position is hard to pin down: Europe condemns dictators but lobbies hard to sell arms to the Chinese Communist Party; it endorses American values of political freedom and a democratic civil society but will not join with America to bring these values to the Middle East; the people of Europe welcome the leaders of the United States with jeers, protests and catcalls, while in Paris the Eiffel Tower will be lit red in honour of the visiting Chinese Premier. Europe must be consistent in this coming battle of ideas and, perhaps one day, of arms. It will be impossible to endorse one set of ideas while engaging in activity that subverts the very values that are being espoused.

Thirdly, Europe must find a way to engage the world as a single Europe. By this it is meant that the people and politicians of the continent must adopt processes that allow half a billion people to speak as one. The laughable situation in which the European Commission can denounce the actions of its own member states but do nothing to restrict them smacks of illegitimacy in the international world. Why does it matter, one might ask, what the European Union as an institution believes? After all, the European Union does not speak for the individual states that will continue to do whatever they please.

Europe, then, must strive to become relevant, first among its member states and citizens and then among the states of the worldwide community of nations. The European Commission (or whatever other organ the states of the Union endorse) then must be trusted to speak with the voice of Europe and trusted by the member states when doing so. Europe's voice is important but, at the present time, it has no single voice, no European opinion and, as a result, no respect from many around the world when it speaks out on matters of war and peace, life and death.

It is addressing such areas as these that Europe will find its role in the world. It is worthwhile imagining, then, the type of Europe that might emerge in the resolution of matters such as these. Three words sum up the Union this author imagines will develop: responsible, reliable and relevant.

A responsible Europe will take a much firmer and faster line on international peace and security than the pattern of its engagement thus far would suggest. A responsible Europe will not allow another Srebrenica so close to home and another Rwanda will be simply unthinkable. A responsible Europe – consistent in its approach to the world and guided by human rights and human dignity – will be the responsible power that the world turns to not only for guidance but, when it is required, intervention.

Similarly, a reliable Europe will make clear whose worldview it will endorse in the ideological battle between democracy and freedom and dictatorship and state secret police. Europe must, in the opinion of this author, endorse the freedom and liberties advocated by the US and join them in standing strong and advocating change in China. This change will not come easily or quickly but it is absolutely necessary that one sixth of humanity be freed to enjoy the rights and freedoms that Europe has worked so hard to provide its own people.

Finally, the future Europe will be relevant in international affairs, taking a larger role than it is afforded today. When a relevant Europe speaks the whole world will listen. A single voice will describe the thoughts, ideals and actions of the world's greatest conglomeration of democratic

states and know that its word is backed with the talents, resources and force of every major actor from the Russian border to the North Atlantic and the Arctic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea.

Imagining this future role for Europe is certainly easier than achieving it will be. So many obstacles lie in the path of those committed to a Europe that will take its place as the great peaceful power of this century. There will be those who will cry that it will cost too much, that it will be 'selling out' values of non-intervention and state sovereignty and that it will require a focus on issues far from European soil. There will be opposition among scholars, sceptics, the popular press and politicians. In imagining the obstacles, however, let us not forget the obstacles to community that faced the founders of today's EU. Did not people point to traditional rivalries as insurmountable barriers to a true European community? Did not people imagine a clash of cultures between east and west Europe, between the southern states and the north? Did not scholars simply dismiss the notion of a peaceful continent established by choice as doomed to fail? And yet a united Europe emerged, overcoming these challenges and denying the critics.

If Europe is to assume the role in the world demanded of a union of its size and power, the critics will have to be confounded again. Answering the 'what's next' question is easier than achieving the change required, but both are necessary for the future of the European Union and the future of peace, democracy and freedom in every country of the world.