

Europe Needs a Closer Union to Survive

Commemoration Speech at the 219th Annual Meeting of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences, 11 November 2015
by Constanze Stelzenmüller

IT WAS AN extraordinary honor for me last year to be called as a fellow of this venerable Academy. The fact that it has been meeting since 1796 is a testament to the resilience of Swedish institutions. It is an even greater privilege for me as a newcomer and as a German to be asked to give the annual Commemoration Speech today.

Of course, this is a bit like taking the exam after being told you've passed. So I have been trying to decide what test of courage might help prove to you that you didn't make the wrong choice. In a fleeting moment of delusion, I considered learning Swedish, so that I might speak to you in the language of this Academy tonight. But that would have guaranteed failure. So I have decided instead to exercise courage in my choice of topic, and to talk to you about why we need deeper European integration – at a time when many people, including in your and my country, seem to be clamoring for the opposite.

I speak to you as a member of the postwar generation of Europeans. A liberal international order made and upheld by the West after 1945 let us be born into a life of seemingly endless peace, prosperity, and progress. That order is in danger today as never before, and this is what I want to speak about to you tonight.

The most dangerous moment since 1962

Not much was expected of us, the children of the post-war baby boom. The message conveyed – sometimes kindly, sometimes with a distinct note of concern – by our elders was: you are inheriting the order we forged in the glowing embers of World War II. Don't break it! But, never mind, they added: All you need to do is to operate the system the way it was designed, and nothing really bad can happen.

So we in our generation were brought up to be managers, not creators. Nowhere was this feeling stronger than in West Germany, where we lived for forty-four years on the front line of the Cold War, but under benign occupation, with limited sovereignty, and increasing material comfort.

Even the first seismic shock to that postwar order, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Warsaw Pact, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, had happier consequences for Germany than for any other country in Europe. West and East Germany were reunited, but that was not all: the enlargement of the EU and NATO surrounded us with a cocoon of peacable, friendly trading partners on all sides. Few of us realized that this had merely pushed our security problems out to our neighbors. For 1989 was supposed to

be the „end of history“ and of ideological competition, after which everybody else in the world would want to be like us, so there would be no more conflict anyway.

Things did not turn out in quite that way. Genocide in Rwanda and the Balkans, the 9-11 attack on America by Al-Qaida, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq: these were all massive shocks to the system.

Now, the crises come in ever shorter intervals. And they don't go away; they pile up and stay there. The financial crisis which hit the world in late 2008 continues to linger, particularly in Europe. Then came Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. Its continued aggression in Ukraine and its campaign of hybrid warfare are destabilizing not just Europe's eastern neighborhood, but Europe itself. War is devastating Iraq and Syria, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has reignited. The Middle East and Northern Africa are seething with tension. To quote Carl Bildt, we are „surrounded by a ring of fire.“

That is, rather uncharacteristically for your former Foreign and Prime Minister, something of an understatement. We may be living in the most dangerous moment since 1962 – the year that saw the building of the Wall, as well as the Cuban Missile Crisis, when America and the Soviet Union very nearly went to actual war with each other.

Faced with an inflow of hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of refugees, walls and barbed wire fences are going up all over Europe – and even *within* Europe. Western nations and Russia are engaged in a proxy war in Syria. And Vladimir Putin's government is not just prodding and probing the weaknesses of the transatlantic alliance and the European Union, but – in a flagrant breach of the ultimate Cold War taboo – has dangled the possibility of using substrategic nuclear weapons in Europe.

So last year's commemoration of the 100th anniversary of what was once called the Great War felt disturbingly relevant for the present day. We were reminded that there are two lessons to be learned from 1914. The first is that war can spring from the tiniest of sparks. If the conditions are right, one assassin's bullet can engulf a continent in flames. The second is that we are bad at learning lessons from war. For after the Great War, with its 20 million deaths, came another, even greater war. It claimed 60 million lives.

1962 added two more lessons. The first is that it takes extraordinary leadership – by which I mean foresight, strong nerves, and the ability to be firm and at the same time stretch out a hand over a seemingly unbridgeable gulf – to prevent catastrophic accidents based on errors of judgment. The other lesson 1962 teaches us is strategic patience. Sometimes you just have to be able to wait, and play a long game. This particular one lasted twenty-seven years.

With those sobering reminders, I am going to discuss two questions tonight:

- How did we get here?
- Where do we go from here?

I will continue with a brief reflection on the role Germany should play – and what I would like to see from Sweden. Finally I will suggest a lesson or two that a later generation might hope to learn from us.

Europe's unique globalization problem

On my first question – how we got to where we are today – it is important to understand first what *didn't* get us there. Some of its critics say that the West is to blame for the current fragility of the international liberal order. Military interventions, or

so they contend, destroyed effective statehood and regional stability. The doctrine of human rights raised false expectations, say the critics; and the enlargement of the European Union and NATO encircled Russia, forcing it to break out and protect its interests abroad. Some even argue that membership in the EU and NATO constrains the nation-state, undermines its sovereignty, and prevents trade with states that may be authoritarian, but offer far higher returns on investment. The only escape, they argue, is for us to build walls, pull up the drawbridges, and disentangle ourselves from rules and alliances. Then, and only then, will we be safe, free, and sovereign once more.

True, the West's record on military intervention is mixed at best. There are wars we should have fought, and didn't (Rwanda). There are wars we fought too late, but for the right reasons, and got right in the end (Bosnia). Then there are wars which we undertook for the right reasons, and managed to screw up all the same (Afghanistan, Libya). And there are some wars which we should never have fought at all (Iraq). Double Standards? Check. Short attention span? What? Oh, yes. Check.

But human rights, international norms, the prosecution of war crimes, rule of law: all these are landmark achievements in the civilization of mankind. Limiting might through right: that is the very essence of Western democracy. We must be proud of these values, and defend them.

Yet we did make one key mistake in 1989: it was to assume that globalization—open borders, trade with the world, and the democratization of mobility and communication through technological innovation—would spread peace and prosperity throughout the world. In other words, that everybody else would want to be like us.

Of course, globalization has immeasurably increased our freedom and our prosperity, and empowered individuals as never before. Solidarnosc, the Velvet Revolution, the candlelight demonstrations in Leipzig, the students in Belgrade, the Euromaidan: these were civil societies standing up for their rights. Leaders (some enlightend, some not so much) understood that they needed to accept this, and did. The EU and NATO did not admit the new members because of some nefarious imperial plan, but because civil societies in Eastern Europe feared Russia, and wanted to be part of a Europe that was whole, free, and at peace.

But globalization has also undermined state power, and sovereignty. States once possessed monopolistic control over populations, territory, and the use of force. Openness and interdependence ended this monopoly; gone with it, mostly, is the possibility of control. That makes states and societies more vulnerable; vulnerability generates fear, competition, and friction. It is food for populist ratcatchers and ideological extremists everywhere.

So the single most important challenge of this age for the nation-state is to adapt to interdependence. By that I mean to preserve or to recover the effectiveness, legitimacy, and flexibility necessary to respond to an environment that will be uncertain and volatile for the foreseeable future.

All states are struggling to make the necessary adaptations to interdependence. This is true even of the sole remaining superpower, the United States, which is lucky to occupy much of a continent, and to possess most of the resources it needs. Moreover, it has two oceans as natural borders, and only one neighbor that it really doesn't trust: Canada.

Europe, in contrast, must trade with the rest of the world to survive. Its borders and

coastlines are so extenuated that they are impossible to seal off, or to defend against a sustained onslaught. The EU and NATO enable a remarkable degree of cohesion, unity of purpose, and sharing of capabilities. But they do not change the existential fact that our continent is deeply fragmented and divided in terms of size, wealth, resources, capital, historical experience, and threat perceptions. Last but not least, Europe's population is not renewing itself fast enough to sustain its economy and its welfare states without substantial immigration in the coming decades.

In short, Europe's globalization problem is unique – and uniquely urgent.

A new rationale for European integration

That brings me to my second question: where do we go from here? The critics' answer is clear: it's the European Union itself that is the problem. If you can't dissolve it, leave it. Do so, and all your problems will be over.

But that is a delusion, because no state can check out of globalization. Small states are particularly vulnerable to the fragmenting forces exercised by globalization—and, *as we become more interdependent, we all become smaller and less powerful*. Not to understand this is the tragic mistake made by the advocates of a Brexit, or of separatist movements in Scotland and Catalonia. Leaving the EU will lead them to lose sovereignty, not to regain it. On the contrary, Europe's route to sovereignty, control, freedom of action, and leverage lies in deeper integration.

Let me be clear: I am not advocating for a European superstate. European unity is not an ideological postulate, but a pragmatic necessity. Why? The European Union's first two

founding rationales—to stop us from going to war against each other again, and to enable us to maximize prosperity by reducing barriers to trade—have been achieved. So has the EU's third historic rationale: after 1989, it enabled the peaceful democratic transformation of thirteen ex-Communist states, and the reunification of Europe (well, almost all of it). These three things—peace, prosperity, and transformative enlargement—are magnificent accomplishments. For these alone, the EU deserved its Nobel Peace Prize.

So if all this is true, why more integration now? Of course the nation-state remains the essential unit of governance and democratic accountability. But after the rationales of peace, prosperity, and enlargement, there is *a new, fourth rationale for European union* today: it is protecting our nation-states against the forces of globalization. The EU is the enabler of our sovereignty—not its destroyer.

The choice we face is stark: either we fail to act, and risk not just the collapse of the European Union project, but a failure of statehood in Europe. Or we adapt, integrate, and survive.

It is not popular these days to advocate further European integration, or more common institutions and rules. But institutions and rules create predictable, transparent processes for solving problems which affect us all. They promote effectiveness, solidarity, legitimacy, and trust. They also save a key resource—political energy—, because they let our leaders concentrate on the truly big decisions, and on planning ahead.

Consider the alternative: Politics, and civil society, in permanent crisis management mode. Nowhere is this more glaringly on view right now than in the refugee crisis. The efforts we see, particularly in Sweden and in my own country, Germany, are hugely im-

pressive. Yet we cannot expect politicians and ordinary citizens to be heroic forever.

There are three main areas in which Europe's nation-states need to achieve deeper integration in order to resolve common European problems: economics and finance; managing immigration; and foreign, defense, and security policy. It is this last point that I want to home in on.

Needed: a real European foreign & security policy

Europe is strongest when it is united, and working with like-minded partners. The Iran deal and the handling of the Ukraine crisis are good (if not ideal) examples: there, Europe and the U.S. have been working together extremely closely, and it is safe to say that major war was averted in both cases. When we cooperate like this, we give each other leverage, and legitimacy. Unfortunately, these two cases of successful European and transatlantic diplomacy are the exception.

Republican and Democratic candidates for the U.S. Presidential election in 2016 like to promise that America will „come back to“ or „lead more“ in Europe. But the next President will discover – just as Barack Obama has – that while the United States continues to have global responsibilities and concerns, its options and resources have shrunk as a consequence of globalization. So it will continue to expect us to do more. Not just that: it will also expect us to be able to do more *alone*, if necessary. And it is quite right: we need to expect more of ourselves.

So if we want to become more effective on our own, and be better partners, we must (to take a phrase from the President of the European Central Bank, Mario Draghi), „do what it takes.“ *If we want to shape our world,*

and our surroundings—rather than be shaped by them—we need to reshape ourselves.

This effort begins at home, with strengthening human and civil rights, separation of powers, pluralist democracy, a vibrant social contract, and decent immigration policies. Only if we can be absolutely certain that these conditions are fulfilled can we safely attend to improving our strategic planning and foresight, our intelligence, our police, and the resilience of our societies. And only then can we, as Western liberal democracies, lay claim to legitimacy in our external relations. (That is why Viktor Orbán's re-molding of Hungary into an authoritarian state, which openly flouts Europe's democratic values, is a danger not just to Hungarians, but to Europe.)

In the arena of foreign policy, we see even the most powerful states in the West engulfed by the demands of crisis management, and seduced by the short-term gains of geo-economics. Overcome by the realization of their limited resources, they promise their anxious citizens that they will do everything to protect the garden at home, even if that means that the world beyond our borders becomes a jungle.

Syria proves that this is a terrible fallacy. If we withdraw from the world and let it become a jungle, the world will come to us; the jungle will come to the garden. The truth is that promoting the stability and transformation of our neighborhoods, and supporting their civil societies' right to choose, is not just in line with our most deeply held values—it is also an investment in our own security and stability. That is why we must support Ukraine, and other states in our neighborhood that seek our help.

Yet state failure, war, and chaos is not the only challenge we face. The Western order is being tested by a growing number of challengers and spoilers—with a surging China

and an assertive, aggressive Russia first and most dangerous among them. Both Beijing and Moscow are experts in unpicking transatlantic and European unity, and in applying pressure to the most vulnerable links in the chain.

Obviously, this challenge requires a response that runs the gamut from diplomacy to deterrence and defense. It will unquestionably require more spending on defense. Still, we have to have the courage to face up to a grim truth:

Most (probably all, if we are honest) of Europe's nation states are unable to afford full spectrum forces. So if we want to strike the right balance between deterrence and defense, and between the threats in Europe's East and the threats in Europe's South; if we want to be effective without free-riding on American capabilities, except in case of direst need, if we want to be able to make good on our promise of solidarity towards our fellow member states, then there is no way around common forces. The only intelligent way to go about this is by treating the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy and NATO as complementary—perhaps even by making them converge.

I would sympathize if some of this strikes you as fanciful. But I say to you: we cannot go on as we are now; nor can we turn back. The way forward is all we have. Greater institutional unity will help reduce our vulnerability, husband our resources and redirect our political and social energies. It is the only route towards regaining freedom of action.

Germany & Sweden: at the frontline again

A word on *Germany and Sweden*. We may be more alike than we are accustomed to thinking. Germany was buffered in its comfortable checkbook pacifism for the last

quarter-century by a protective cordon of neighbors and allies. Sweden, although often pursuing a very active and wide-ranging foreign policy, has been somewhat insulated by its location on the periphery of European geopolitics.

This has changed radically for both of our countries. Arguably, globalization makes us all frontline states in a highly volatile security environment. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has brought geopolitics back to our neighborhood with a vengeance; and the Syrian refugees have brought the Middle East to our doorstep. We are now even connected by our own bilateral security and solidarity conundrum, as Syrian refugees land in the German Baltic port city of Rostock, trying to get to Sweden.

Germany has, to its own surprise, become the leader of Europe – the *Economist* calls Chancellor Merkel the „indispensable European“ – even if this is mostly by default rather than by choice. It has responded by making a very deliberate effort to design a more forward-leaning foreign and security policy (including a defense budget increase). But its record on brokering consensus and leading by example is very mixed: successful and pretty good (so far) on Ukraine, successful and deeply unpopular on Greece, and unsuccessful *and* unpopular on Syrian refugees. And we, like you, are grappling with a deeply worrying upsurge in populism, led by politicians who fundamentally question the values our postwar orders were built on.

Meanwhile, Sweden's internal debate about whether to join NATO is being keenly observed by others – and not just by its friends.

It is not for me to make recommendations on this point. I will note, however: whatever reinforces unity and integration, whatever lets us focus precious political energy where it is truly needed, is good for you, for

us, and for Europe. And who knows how much time we have? Can you, can we afford to wait until choices are forced on us?

Still, let me say this much: We in the rest of Europe know that greater Swedish engagement would benefit us. Specifically, Stockholm (together with Warsaw) played a very significant role in getting Berlin to pay more attention to Eastern Europe. Perhaps now you could step in to help us negotiate a more lasting security consensus in Europe overall. That would fit in with the best Swedish tradition, and it can certainly not be done by Germany alone.

But perhaps there are also ways in which we, and Europe, can be of assistance for you? Alyson Bailes, in many ways the doyenne of Nordic security studies (and a mentor for many of us here, including me), puts it with her usual dry tact and precision in

FOI's just-published „Strategic Outlook“: „It is wise to be open to the thought that something good might come to Sweden from the world, as well as vice versa.“

So what is the lesson from 2015 that I would like one day to be able to say my generation learned in time to avert catastrophe – as an earlier generation did in 1962, and still earlier ones failed to do in 1914 and 1933? I think it is very simple:

We European democracies were wise enough to recognize our best hope in each other. And our leaders had the courage, the nerves, and the patience, to act accordingly.

The Author is a Doctor, a Robert Bosch Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, and a fellow of the Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences.

Note

1. This is an edited version of the speech given on November 11