Once Again on the Crisis of European Civilization

It’s as if there is an ongoing competition for the best headline for the leading story. Smart and sharp-tongued journalists have had a field day. ‘Summer of Discontent’, ‘The Last Supper’ – this is about the last meal of Prime Minister of the United Kingdom David Cameron with his companions from the EU. ‘The end of another utopia’, ‘Pandora’s Box’, ‘From now on everything will be different’ – meaning Europe first of all, but not only that. This is all, of course, about the wholly unexpected results of the EU referendum of June 23 this year in Great Britain, about Brexit.

The conclusion that is currently dominating the analysis of events is that it may be the start of a new process of disintegration of the western world; as the further functioning of the European Union within its present parameters and forms has been put under the spotlight. The present situation is frequently being described as the beginning of a chain reaction, and European politicians are afraid, as The Daily Telegraph stressed recently, that Brexit may be the start of a ‘domino effect’ and even the beginning of the collapse of the entire European Union (the Czech President has already called for a referendum on the EU and NATO membership).

Günter Verheugen, the former Vice-President of the European Commission and former European Commissioner for Enlargement, is not hiding his anxiety over the fact that “current EU leaders will not find a way out of the crisis.” He stated it bluntly in an interview to Deutsche Welle.

Analyzing the reasons for such an unpredictable turnaround of events, the American weekly, Time, in its most recent June issue stated that the essence of it lies in the confrontation between the ruling elites and ordinary, grass-roots voters, which became perceivable and prominent. The most striking thing is that voters, as Brexit has shown, are capable to break ‘the legitimacy of the ruling elite’ into pieces in just a single campaign. Moreover, this process is spreading, and is fueled by a highly potent mixture of xenophobia and burning anxiety about the loss of sovereignty and national identity.

Time also quoted the London political analyst Tony Travers, who is of the opinion that “in some sense, the result of the British EU referendum is a worldwide victory of ‘Trumpism’, for supporters of Trump as supporters of Brexit, tend to believe that the traditional parties have ignored their concerns about migration and economic inequality for too long.

If we consider why such traditionally cautious people, like the British made such a ‘huge leap’ into the unknown, Roger Cohen, a columnist for The New York Times, in the issue of June 27, 2016, advises that this should be taken seriously as such a ‘leap’ may occur elsewhere, for example, in Trump’s US.

The point that the assessments and comments made in the Western media and in analytical materials can agree on is a reproach of the leaders of the Western countries for their limitations and short-sightedness, their inability to anticipate the likely scenarios. This is true for all affairs of the Old World in general, but especially at the present stage: dealing with the problem of Islamic terrorism, which they are trying to manipulate, and to use it for their own purposes. As a result, the situation has developed such that terror has actually become commonplace in the everyday...
life of Europe and the United States. The entire series of terrorist attacks in European and American cities, not to mention Turkey, serve as evidence for this.

The fact that the announcement of the EU referendum results in the UK has led to a burst of xenophobia and racism, is a very dangerous side of the latest development of the situation. Racist cards were found, according to The Guardian in a number of areas; in Newcastle a banner was hoisted which read “Stop immigration, start repatriation”. There were a lot of messages from people from South Asian countries, who complained of racism incidents against them. Migrant workers from Eastern Europe are gripped by fear: the Polish are being advised to start packing their bags for the journey home. Xenophobic incidents are becoming increasingly frequent. All this is yet another confirmation of the obvious, already generally recognized failure of the idea of multiculturalism.

It has become common practice to erect walls and fences at borders: rich countries are trying to separate themselves from their less affluent neighbors. There are a lot of examples of this: the planned wall between the US and Mexico; Israel is building a fence, closing off the passage for Palestinians; and a number of EU countries are erecting barriers to prevent or restrict the flow of refugees.

It should also be noted that many analysts are linking the formal apology of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to President Vladimir Putin with the results of the EU referendum in the UK: Brexit has clearly shown how vague the European perspective is for Turkey.

It seems absurd that, in spite of the distinctly manifested new trends in the balance at the political landscape, the neo-conservatives in the United States and their allies in the European countries have not drawn conclusions from the failure of the policy to ‘divide and conquer’: the incitement of religious, ethnic, national hatred remains one of the components of the overall western policy. Evidence of this abounds: not so long ago, in June 2016 Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State, visited Ukraine, where he launched a Vatican humanitarian mission center called ‘Pope for Ukraine’: through this humanitarian center, the aid, collected by the Catholics of Europe, shall be given to displaced persons and other victims of the war in Donbass: it amounts to millions of euro. It is noteworthy that the Vatican representative claimed the military conflict in Donbass to be “a sign of confrontation of civilizations”.

In Europe itself, the voices of those who belong to the right-wing nationalist forces, are becoming increasingly distinct. On June 28, 2016 The New York Times published an article by Marine Le Pen, who became a popular and influential politician, in which she calls the EU a ‘prison of peoples’ and points out that some European countries have been campaigning to pursue a more independent policy for several years. This refers, in particular, to France and the Netherlands, which in 2005 held referenda on the proposed EU Constitution project. The opposition then was so significant that other governments immediately decided to halt the experiment, for ‘the infection’ might spread rapidly. As for the referendum in 2015 in Greece, it was, in fact, generally ignored by Brussels. Marine Le Pen predicts that the European Union shares the fate of the USSR, which collapsed due to internal contradictions. And so, on June 23 this year, the day of the EU referendum in the UK, it was the moment of truth, the history of Europe made a turn, from now on a great deal will be totally different. There will be different relations within the EU, between its individual members and between them and the outside world, although the parameters of the centrifugal trends and aspirations of individual countries and regions of the Old World are not yet clear: whether they are tending towards the preservation or restoration of their identity and independence.

In recent days, there was an outpouring of messages, comments, and assessments on the future of Europe. There is not much optimism in the forecasts announced thus far, but there isn’t any panic: this is due to the traditional European expression of self-control and restraint. However, almost all assessments contain hints of the statement that Europe’s present suspended state is a result of the policy of the current European leaders, who are openly blamed for a lack of long-term vision and sense of responsibility for the fates of their nations. They make major mistakes and blunders: primarily, in echoing of US policy, whether it is on a global or regional scale: in the Middle East, Africa, and Ukraine. These mistakes, as many experts think, may have the most negative consequences for the European nations both in the short and long run.

Veniamin Popov, Director of the Center for the Partnership of Civilizations at MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations) of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook.”