Revisiting the Crisis of Western European Civilization

Of late, political scientists from the US and Western European countries have begun more frequently writing on the crisis of the West. Indeed, the confusion that now reigns in Washington, the discord in the European Union, and the growing tug-of-war between Washington and the European capitals all but lead to the one conclusion that western civilization has completely gone to the dogs. And especially grotesquely does this fact manifest itself not only in the heap of economic difficulties, financial scandals and corruption, as well as moral corruption, but also in the paucity of intellectual thought of the modern Western establishment.

Indeed, it does seem that sometimes, the Western elites choose to live in isolation from reality, in some other world they created for themselves, and their confidence in their own greatness and infallibility is so ingrained that they are not able to assess new challenges and threats adequately. The following reasoning of British Defense Minister Michael Fallon (in the Daily Telegraph on June 27, 2017) serves as a colorful illustration of this reality: “We are attacked, not because we’ve failed, but because of the success of our values and beliefs that have spread across the globe and taken root far beyond the Berlin Wall. We shouldn’t downplay what we can offer. Like Mrs Thatcher, we too are engaged in a battle of ideas. It’s a battle we must win – making it clear, in word and deed, that our values are not tradable.” The minister called on the West to act decisively and confidently, and again talked about the same “great values”. And sometimes, it does seem that some Western politicians are now deep inside their hearts realizing that the crisis is gaining momentum, and thus try to encourage themselves with such rhetoric.

Before showing others the way, it would be good for some British leaders to look at themselves. For instance, the British themselves have barely been able to cope with both Brexit and the new wave of terror, not mentioning the intention of Scotland to withdraw from the kingdom or the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

The paradox itself lies in the fact that the ruling elites are dominated by perceptions of their own eternal superiority, their right to either mentor or blame others. Confident in the strength of his positions, former British Prime Minister David Cameron himself initiated a referendum, and as a result, lost his post. In the elections that she recently announced, the no-less-ambitious and self-confident current premier Theresa May has counted on an unconditional victory. To iron out the failure and maintain her position in power, she started calling for the support of the Democratic Unionist Party of Ireland, a move that saw the prime minister being forced to “shell out” 1 billion pounds sterling.

A very dangerous phenomenon of modern society is its deep and growing economic stratification into the rich elite and the poor masses. According to a number of well-known academics, for example, Canadian professor Thomas Homer-Dixon, on reaching a critical point, this gap could lead to a collapse and an overburdening and scrapping of the established social mechanisms and institutions.

In this regard, an increasing number of experts point to Britain, where the class divergence has become more and more obvious and tangible in the past 15 years. This was acknowledged by Head of Government Theresa May, when she took office. And a few days ago, the American New York Times also published a frankly-written article on this very issue entitled “Britain's Broken Ladder of Social Mobility”, pointing out that in England, “only 4 percent of doctors and 6 percent of trial lawyers come from working-class backgrounds.” Never before did graduates from wealthy families with social ties have such opportunities in getting prestigious jobs. Children from wealthy families
have 4 times more chances of getting into any of the 24 main English universities than their peers from poor backgrounds. Of the 6,500 students annually recruited at Oxford and Cambridge, only 40 can be classified as coming from low-income backgrounds.

Perhaps the most obvious and eloquent manifestation of this kind of intellectual insolvency is the European Union's policy towards the Mediterranean.

After the collapse of the USSR, the then EU leaders decided to take advantage of the situation and confirm their unconditional priority right to ensure stability in the Mediterranean region, which they considered the soft underbelly of Europe. In 1995, the so-called Barcelona Declaration was adopted that established the Euro-Mediterranean Project for the widest cooperation between the two shores of the sea (the southern and the northern). Neither the United States nor Russia was invited to participate in the Barcelona proceedings, as the Europeans made the argument that they themselves would be able to provide the region with peace and stability. The goal of creating a free trade zone by 2010 was solemnly proclaimed. However, it soon became clear that the European states had only wanted to open markets in the southern Mediterranean countries for their own industrial goods, while blocking agricultural products from the coastal African and Asian states. The idea of the zone thus promptly failed.

On the Barcelona process, dozens of books and hundreds of articles have been written in which the advantages of the Euro-Mediterranean Project and the benefits that the citizens of the Mediterranean countries now receive are proved in different ways. It was not difficult to foresee the unrealistic aims of the Barcelona process. After a while, it was replaced by a new project - the Union of the Mediterranean. This proposal was made by the then French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Under the drumbeat of broadcast statements, the idea of unifying all the coastal states was formulated (Angela Merkel quickly reminded Sarkozy who was the boss in Europe, and as a result, all EU members were added to the ranks of the coastal states).

In Paris, it was announced during a solemn ceremony that moving onwards, the 44 states would transform this area of the world into a prosperous zone. After this Paris meeting, no further action would be taken to implement its resolutions, since the period of the so-called “Arab Spring” was already approaching, and British and French NATO aircrafts, with the support of the United States, began bombing Libya, one of the most stable and rich Mediterranean countries. In this way, not only was the idea of the Union for the Mediterranean buried, but the events that followed were also tragic and terrible, with several tens of thousands of Libyans killed under the NATO bombardment.

The history of Turkey’s aspirations to be admitted into the European Union is clear evidence of the inconsistency of the policy of the European Union towards the Mediterranean zone. Although Ankara did get the status of candidate-country back in 1999, the entry negotiations and membership talks only began in 2005, and to this day, the finality and closure to this process are still out of sight.

Finally, the migrant inflow is one of the most acute and dramatic problems of today's Europe that is a direct consequence of the shortsighted policies of Western leaders. And, as expected, there is no solidarity in the EU on this issue. Poland and Hungary have refused to grant asylum to newcomers. Official Rome is requiring EU assistance, threatening to close the ports that were designated for servicing humanitarian rescue ships.

Through their actions, current European leaders have created new hotbeds of tension in the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and North Africa, increasing the wave of refugees that the European Union is still to cope with.

Contemporary events in the EU countries, which have been characterized by economic turmoil, growing problems with migrants, a state of tension and fear following acts of violence and terror that have shocked and continue shocking countries in Western Europe, are indeed a poignant confirmation that ordinary people have to pay a high price for the irresponsibility, arrogance, selfishness and indifference of their leaders.

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