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Rising Like the Phoenix

By Jarda Tusek

From the smoke and rubble of World War II, the vision of a united Europe has gradually progressed from a coal-and-steel trading arrangement to a common market, then to a European Community and now to a novel and influential new paradigm of the state, the European Union.

Today's European Union encompasses more than half a billion people as it stretches from Ireland to Portugal to Estonia, from Finland to Greece and Cyprus. It has all the major accoutrements of a nation-state: a president, a parliament, a cabinet, a central bank, a common currency, a bill of rights and a constitution (now pending ratification by all 27 member countries), and a unified patent office.

What's more, even the halls of justice are now European rather than Czech, French or British—the European Union's court system can overrule any individual member's courts in certain cases. Taken together with the trade agreements and fair-market economic practices enforced by the EU, the common currency (the Euro) which has been adopted by 13 member states, with more online to adopt it in the coming years, and the ever-tightening bonds of living, working, traveling and investing as one entity, the European Union al-



Photo, courtesy Dr. Z. A. Tusek

most looks more stable and rational than the United States of America.

THE "OLD EUROPE" IS GONE

The possible replacement of the US dollar by the Euro as the world's reserve currency, a move much sought after by the EU member countries, makes a very significant statement about Europe: the continent has moved from conflict to cooperation, making the EU economically, politically, legally, ethnically and culturally a powerful borderless state.

These breathtaking changes over just six decades constitute a true revolution, albeit one accomplished through quiet, steady progress rather than dramatic events. It's as if, after surveying the bloody battlegrounds and ruined cities of the Second World War, the political, religious, and cultural leaders of Europe said, "Never again." War, the 20th century's legacy in Europe, can in the short

run be controlled by military means, such as advanced weapons and frightening strike capability—but the most effective and long-lasting control, perhaps, is mutual interdependence.

When a country's closest trading partners are linked to it by a common currency, a centralized banking system, binding trade agreements and overarching judicial authority, not to mention a common cultural and historical heritage, war becomes almost unthinkable. In fact, one might see a remarkable parallel between the relationships of the states which are members of the United States of America and the countries which are members of the European Union in the unity produced by strong economic and governmental bonds.

THE HISTORY OF THE PRESENT

But what is perhaps most remarkable about this "quiet revolution" is that it has gone virtually unnoticed by Europe's transatlantic neighbors. Americans continue to talk about the French, say, as if that country could be isolated and rebuffed for its failure to support American military and economic actions around the world. The "Old European" capitals of Berlin, London, Amsterdam, Prague, Athens, Helsinki and so on are still talked about as if they were making national policies for their respective countries



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when, in reality, nearly all international policy for the member states is either generated or regulated by the EU.

A NEW REALITY

The US government (or at least the US media) seems to have somehow missed this unprecedented history-making geopolitical shift involving half a billion people. In 2003, the EU had a higher GDP than the US by nearly half again, at the same time balancing its imports and exports while the US imported twice as much as it exported. Given the potential for the EU to decisively overtake the US economically and perhaps in other arenas of global predominance, in the next decades, it would seem wise and prudent to examine the new reality of Europe's re-ascendancy after a century of war's devastation.

At a recent ILI planning meeting, we discussed the changing face of Europe, as we considered direction for the International Leadership Institute in 2007. Our mission states that we will continue to provide high-quality customized leadership development programs and services and develop high-quality relevant publications that support this mission. The context of our mission is our on-going intent to move

our business operations from the US to the Czech Republic within the next three years. We will also continue our emphasis on the educational and career development of our clients, while making available resources for their spiritual development.

In contemplation of our move, we are examining various strategies and methods. Should we perhaps act as "typical Americans," taking the attitude that we are doing our European friends a big favor to give them our expertise and wisdom? We must admit that we have been guilty of such an attitude in the past, when we earnestly believed that the American way was the best way, and often the only way, to build a strong market economy in a democracy. No doubt our zeal for the American way of doing business was, at times, a trial to our clients and friends alike.

The results speak for themselves: the impressive growth of the European Union has been accomplished within an economic and political framework that is not identical to that of the US, to say the least. In fact, many European Union practices and principles are quite different from those of the United States.

TIME TO RECONSIDER

We have witnessed the birth of a new geopolitical powerhouse without quite knowing what we're seeing. The EU brings to its member states these assets:

- economic growth and cooperation
- the guarantee of an impressive range of human rights
- guaranteed health care for all, delivered through a health system which the US might envy
- political stability in a volatile and unstable world
- an ability to integrate an extremely diverse body (with 20 official languages) of former bitter enemies and traitorous friends into a functional mosaic of custom and belief.

From this phoenix rising, we expect great things. With a commitment to cooperation and unity rather than division and strife, the EU provides a model of statecraft that promotes human welfare and happiness. We look forward to learning from the Europeans in sincere friendship and equality, in Prague and elsewhere in Europe.

Much of the information in this article comes from T. R. Reid's The United States of Europe, Penguin Press, 2004.

Providing Leadership Development Services and Programs in the US and Europe since 1985
 Sara Tusek, Editor
 830-13 A1A North, #317
 Ponte Vedra Beach FL 32082
 Tel/Fax: 904.992.8729; tusek@fdn.com;
 www.ili.cc