

A third consideration; Europe

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Our [editorials of 9](#) and [16 February](#) considered the situations of Spain and Catalonia respectively. These we examined from a political and economic point of view, as well as the mood in the countries and their capacity to react. Among the feedback generated by these two editorials, a number of people have asked our Foundation to carry out a similar reflection on Europe.

It is a highly pertinent request, because Europe is frail at present and because Catalan nationalism has always been closely tied to Europeism.

Yes, Europe is not going through the best of times. In economic terms it has lost productivity and competitiveness. Of course it continues to be the world's first market and, all told, with Germany at the top, it continues to have a great export potential. But it has lost speed. The goal of the Lisbon Treaty, which was to make Europe the most competitive continent already seems out of reach. Over the last decade from 2000 to the present, the change has been spectacular, and for the worse.

Europe is not going through a good time politically, either. It has lost political weight and, though it is still a military power, it has been held back by the economic downturn and reticent public opinion. Europe has had to content itself with being a junior partner of the United States.

By and large it has lost strategic power. Europe is rarely mentioned in American strategic study circles – in universities, think tanks, and so forth. The burning issues are China the contender, India a possible ally and Islamic terrorism. But little is said about Europe. At any rate, much less than before. And America is clearly distancing itself from Europe. This was all too evident in the climate change summit in Copenhagen.

There are several explanations for this. One evident reason is that the process of European unification has advanced little, or at least more slowly than it should have done. Europe's current economic and monetary crisis has made this failing apparent. And the difficulty in defining an energy policy. A thorny area for everyone, above all for Europe, which overly depends in large part on Russia, a tricky country to deal with. This is also illustrated rather pathetically in the way Europe expressed its disappointment when President Obama declined to take part in a summit between the EU and the U.S. (which was intended to be held in Madrid). Obama represented (and may in part still do so) an opportunity for Europe. "We can do business with him", the Europeans claimed. Yet Obama was also a challenge. Saying no to Obama's America, depending on the issue, is more complicated than it was to Bush's. And the United States has begun to express its dismay. This on the one hand. On the other, some European politicians have gone to almost ridiculous lengths to obtain a photo opportunity with President Obama. Such practices do not leave a very good impression.

Europe feels threatened from the “near” East, by Russia, from the Far East by Asia, from the West by its cooling relations with America. But it has added problems. One, the falling birth-rate. Only the populations of France, the Scandinavian countries and Ireland are withstanding or almost withstanding (without immigration). The rest are not. Clearly not. This situation can be remedied by immigration. But it is both solution and problem. We could say that the problem comes from the South. It might help in several ways, but it is already clear that it could also pose a serious problem. At any rate, for a large part of Europe, it is causing deep concern. And it is one component – not the only one – of the identity crisis that the Europeans are experiencing.

This negative view of Europe and its future is from where Aznar drew inspiration for his policies, which boiled down to let’s secure everything we can from Europe (therefore let’s ratify and cooperate), but, with respect to the future, let’s look to the United States. This was an error. Now, ten years later, this error cannot be put right. Because America is looking in other directions.

Alas, Catalonia can do little about it. We are pro-Europe not because we feel we can benefit from it, but because, due to historic and cultural ties, being European is part, far more than many other peoples, of our identity, of our sentiment and of our consciousness of a country. Therefore, it is good for Catalonia that the European values, consciousness and project are upheld and advanced (or at least, are not be neglected).

Regarding European values, we conclude this reflection by taking note of the fact that what is at stake in this pan-European crisis is not merely Europe’s political and economic weight, but its Western values.

A few days ago, Javier Solana said in ESADE that we are witnessing a process of de-Westernisation that will continue in all probability. And we should remember – should it be necessary – that the West means Europe and the United States.

And the question we pose is: does this imply simply a loss of economic and political weight, or does it also imply a step back in western values? We mean, those which have been and are the lynchpin of Democracy and the Welfare State...

Perhaps of the latter – the values to defend, here and the world over – further discussion will be needed.