

Europe Rebuilt?

Panos Trigazis

As Greece assumes the Presidency of the European Union, Panos Trigazis looks ahead. He directs SYRIZA's International Relations and Peace work. In the spring, Spokesman will publish an English edition of his acclaimed book, Lambrakis and the Peace Movement.

The cause of European unification has been seriously undermined by the recent deep crisis that has been accompanied by a devastating neoliberal onslaught, especially in southern European countries. At risk is not only the cohesion of the eurozone and the European Union, but their very existence. Serious problems likewise exist in relations between the EU and Russia.

Let us recall that, in 1990, the Charter for a New Europe was signed in Paris, promising 'a new era of peace and unity' on our continent. The Cold War had just ended, the Berlin Wall had fallen, and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) was upgraded and entered a new phase.

But the promises were not kept and hopes proved to be in vain, initially with the brutal dissolution of Yugoslavia, and then with the divisive decision to expand NATO to the Russian border, as part of the planned 'new world order' under US domination.

Thus, the crisis in the EU was foreshadowed; it is a crisis of the neoliberal model of unification that was chosen by the leaderships of the ruling political forces, both conservatives and social democrats.

For the EU to be saved, it must change radically. The discussion about the future of Europe requires us to look back at the roots of the European idea, as we draw up proposals to overcome the present crisis of European unification and to demand a new, re-established Europe.

Some people believe that this cannot happen, that the EU cannot change. Others regard a united Europe as a western European idea conceived during the Cold War; they are often unaware that this concept was first expressed 200 years ago

by avant-garde, enlightened European thinkers as the desire for a democratic, peace-loving and united Europe. The socialist Henri de Saint-Simon, for example, initially spoke of a united Europe in 1814.

Today, when the EU and the eurozone are being shaken by a profound and multidimensional crisis, re-establishing the vision of Europe comes urgently to the fore. Many years ago, I argued that in order for Europe to unite, it would have to change drastically. Because, as Professor Kostas Vergopoulos has written, ‘Europe is committing suicide’ as long as it remains a captive of the current extreme neoliberal policies.

Allow me to point out that what is happening in Europe today is equivalent to a cultural counter-revolution. Because if the heart of modern European civilisation lies in the social and democratic gains of working people since World War Two, wiping out these gains is no less than a cultural counter-revolution.

For Europe to change radically, it must find its way to human-centred visions. European unification must be re-born as a plan of political liberation, with solidarity at its heart and the forces of labour, culture and the ecology in its front ranks, backed by corresponding movements. Because, as pointed out by Italian journalist and thinker, Luciana Castellina, ‘it is fair to say that the peace movement in the 1980s contributed more to building the idea of Europe as a community than all the European institutions with their Treaties in over half a century’.

Re-establishing Europe demands a return to the roots of the European idea, by forging a new relationship between the EU and Russia and rejecting Euro-Atlanticism and the divisive expansion of NATO, a relic of the Cold War. Let us not forget that inclusive European institutions already exist, such as the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (formerly CSCE).

Have we any reason to be optimistic? The answer is ‘yes’, as long as we keep in mind that, not many years ago, very few people believed that Latin America would follow the path of anti-neoliberal changes, that it would dispute the dominance of the US, and would cease to constitute the unfenced backyard of the ‘sole super-power’.

Ignacio Ramonet, former editor-in-chief of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, wrote: ‘The old idea that Latin America was the “backyard” of the USA is long outdated ... In Latin America, the new socialisms of the 21st century, reinforced by the dynamics of the social movements, are bubbling over with political creativity and social inventiveness. We are witnessing a renaissance, a true re-establishment of our continent.’

Why can’t what’s happening in Latin America be done in Europe, too?