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The Eurasian Politician - March 2004

Will Europe survive to year 2012?

By: *Antero Leitzinger, March 16, 2004*
(Translation: AKK)

The "number of the beast" of the Book of Apocalypse, Nostradamus' prophecies, astrology and numerological magic have entertained people for centuries. Even if history was not predetermined and predictable, it might be useful to present some scenarios, based on historical comparisons, presuppositions of repeating cycles, and warning examples.

European history has been traditionally approached from a Western point of view, where the central point would be situated somewhere around Switzerland. From the slopes of Sankt Gotthard, the great rivers flow to different directions, towards the North Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Black Sea. The antagonism between Germany and France has been the dominant theme shaping European great power politics and European integration. However, the geographical central point of Europe has been located in Lithuania, the greatest river of Europe starts from the uplands of Valdai, and in the Caucasus, there are higher peaks than in the Alps. Perhaps then Europe's fate, too, has been more dramatically shaped by the centuries of antagonism between Turkey and Russia?

According to the Anglo-Saxon point of view, which has become familiar to us through all the movies, the ultimate goal of Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler was the conquest of England. Campaigns into Russia were just fatal by-plots. The Nordic history, however, also remembers Charles XII [King of Sweden], who advanced as far as to Pultava, and escaped from there to the protection of Turkey. Were all these three conquerors just megalomaniac fools, obsessed by some kind of an odd Russia fever, which led them to a military suicide on the endless steppes? This romantic view understandably prevails in Russia and it has also been accepted by the dissidents who have criticized the adventurous policies of European great powers. However, serious historians have always known that Russia was by no means perfectly innocent to its great patriotic wars. Russia participated the partitions of Poland, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, and the Yalta division of Europe. The Russian army had wandered at the Alps before Bonaparte took power in France.

This means that the events of Russian history have shaped Europe far away in the West, too. Could we learn something useful for understanding Europe, by comparing Russia's reactions to its state of weakness after the Crimean War (1853-1856), after the First World War (1914-1918), and after the fall of the Warsaw Pact (1989-1991)?

The Crimean War was followed by seven hopeful years of reforms, during which the serfs (land slaves) were released, political control was eased, the Caucasus War was brought to an end, and the autonomy of Finland was strengthened. These years were followed by fourteen years of mixed hope and doubt, during which the Polish uprising was crushed, the Circassians were deported, political assassinations and terrorism increased, the state became indebted, Alaska was sold, but Turkestan was conquered. Then came five years of political violence: the war against Turkey (1877-1878), the assassination of the czar and the illegal cancellation of the constitution, and the pogroms against Jews (1881-1882).

The First World War was followed by seven years of chaos and disorder, which were highlighted in the rising hopes when the civil war was over and the economy had revived a bit. After Lenin's death and before Stalin established his tyranny, the administration had its own kind of a democratic flavor, and dissatisfied citizens were allowed to travel abroad. However, this period was changed to a period of fourteen years (1925-1939), during which the strangling grip of communism got worse. Finally, six years of war were experienced.

The liberation of Eastern Europe and disintegration of the Soviet Union (1991) were followed by seven hopeful years, although the first Chechen War (1994-1996) was heralding a change. Then came the devaluation (1998), Vladimir Putin's rise into power (1999), the second Chechen War (1999-), the gradual rehabilitation of Soviet symbols, the erosion of the freedom of speech, and the fading of democracy. We might presently witness a period of fourteen years, which most observers interpret in contradictory terms, but increasingly negatively. We can ask, whether this period will be followed by a political cramp including war and external threat. Then the year 2012 might be the time when Russia must explode against its neighbors.

The Baltic States got to enjoy their full independence 21 years (1918-1939), before they were again occupied. From their new independence (1991), same time will be past only in 2012. Before that there will be no reason to suppose that they would be permanently safe, and that the Russian leaders would have forgotten the "good old days" for good.

Putin's presidency will last until 2008. His re-election for the period 2008-2012 requires an exceptional law (as was the case in Finland with President Urho Kekkonen), or a change of constitution. This year, 200 years will be past from the year when Napoleon had himself crowned as an emperor. It is also easy to find similarities between Putin and Benito Mussolini, as well as many military dictators, who tend to seek life-time reign, and often also enjoy relatively large popular support in the beginning. A basic problem of dictators is how to justify their power over a

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The Baltic States are now members of the EU and NATO, but will this decisively save them? First and foremost we have to ask, will the membership in the EU and NATO, still after eight years, raise enough respect in Russia to pre-empt Russian desires for expansion?

Right now it seems evident that the enlargement of the EU gets slower, and Turkey will not be able to enter by 2012. It may indeed happen that the Cyprus question paralyzes the EU foreign political decision-making as early as this year. The EU is torn by internal controversies - and not least on the field of foreign policy. The German government will change in the next election, but by 2012 it may change for a second time. When the Madrid bombings (March 11, 2004) have proved that terrorism is a successful method of changing pro-Western governments in Europe, the future right-wing government of Germany will have to live in a constant fear for terrorism.

If George W. Bush gets elected for a second term in November, the EU's relations with the US will remain cool. The situation was similar after the re-elections of Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan. Eisenhower, Nixon and Reagan disagreed with their European allies originally in their relationship with the Soviet Union, but soon also in their policies in the Middle East. In Europe, "street parliaments" and "intellectuals" demanded unilateral disarmament, marched for peace, and made scorn of the intellect of the US president, but the governments in Western Europe still realized how dangerous the communist threat really was. How many of the European governments will be able to resist the defeatism agitated by left-wing media, or has the guts to commit itself to defending the Baltic States, even in theory? Will the healthy instincts of self-preservation and national defense of the Europeans survive to 2012?

The Baltic States and Poland have experienced enough many betrayals to not trust in the protection of the EU. However, also the unity of NATO is questionable, as Germany, France and Belgium refused to grant Turkey security guarantees a year ago. Probably the Baltic States and Poland, even as NATO members, will have to count on their traditional ally, Turkey, in addition to the US.

If Bush will be re-elected, his vice president candidate could have excellent chances to win in the 2008 election - with the prerequisite that this candidate is not too old. An interesting opportunity would be Condoleezza Rice, whose foreign political expertise is overwhelming, and who has also written a book about the reunification of Germany. Rice believes in the balance of power and rational political game, where it makes sense to accept the best possible achievement without unnecessary conflict, but where also preparing for the worst is not avoided.

If John Kerry would be elected president, his second term would be at its end in 2012. Whatever the case, the year would be an election year, when the US administration is cautious and has to take into consideration all the reactions of the media. Either the president would avoid an escalation of the crisis with all means, or (if the president is Republican) the media could be harnessed for a campaign, which would paralyze all foreign political decision-making. The moment would be extremely ripe for a quick and unscrupulous invasion, unless the Europeans want to defend themselves.

The occupation of the Baltic countries would be prepared with a campaign, where the following arguments are expected to arise, fed into Western European media, and perhaps supported by conspiratorial operations and provocations:

- There are striking violations of human rights or discrimination against the Russian minorities in the Baltic States.
- The Baltic governments are protecting terrorists acting against Russia (Chechen refugees). [Mysterious bomb blasts could occur to support the claims.]
- Lithuania is causing troubles to the Russian transit to the special enclave of Kaliningrad [Königsberg].
- The EU should grant Russians freedom of visa.
- Putin has to do something, because otherwise a radical nationalist would rise into power. [A provocateur could be activated for the purpose.]
- The Baltic States should pay themselves for their adventurous foreign politics.
- The Baltic countries have never really belonged to Europe.
- The possibility of a (nuclear) devastation of a third world war must not be even thought of.
- NATO has become anachronistic, and conflicts must be subjected to the OSCE or UN.
- Russia does not want to suppress Baltic independence, but just to keep Americans away.

Political trends in the Western countries have been changing in waves. The right-wing 1950s were followed by the "new-leftist" shift of the 1960s and 1970s, and the "new-rightist" 1980s. The support of the left in Western Europe peaked around the change of millennium, when Spain and Austria were the few countries in Western Europe dominated by the right wing - Austria ending in a EU boycott. It is relatively sensible to expect a rightist peak around 2010. The terrorists who have been inspired by the Spanish experience in March 2004 could feel an irresistible temptation to try toppling down these rightist governments two years later.

Right-wing thought has changed its shape over times. A wave of anti-Semitism spread to the West from Russia in the 1870s, 1920s, and 1990s. It has been mixed with anglophobia (until 1946) and anti-Americanism (thereafter). After the extermination of any large populations of Jews, the Muslims have become a similar "alien" element and a suitable scapegoat. Local prejudices against Chechens (in Russia), Albanians (in Serbia and Macedonia), Turks (in Germany), North Africans (in France), and Pakistanis (in Britain) can be easily unified as a common all-European islamophobia, where all Muslims are treated as terrorists, socially misfit and abusers of social welfare. Targeting xenophobia against Muslims serves well Russia's interests and helps in closing Turkey (as well as Albania and Bosnia) out of the EU.

In today's Europe, islamophobia is just in the bud, just like anti-Semitism once upon the time. It is, however, fomented by the radical demands of Islamist communities, which irritate the dominant populations, and by international terrorism, which causes irrational fear. Sooner or later European citizens will grow weary of all the security measures and hope that Europe would have nothing to do with the Islamic world. While the US is actively participating in the defence of Israel, Turkey and Pakistan, in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq, in the returning of

Lebanon's sovereignty, and other projects of the Middle East, the troubled Europeans will easily... decision can easily
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Although the Islamists attempt to pose
 Islamists are actually rebel groups fighting against their own governments (including the Saudi monarchy). Their relationship with inclusive
 ideologies like Pan-Arabism or Pan-Islamic thought is about as genuine as the relationship of European terrorist organizations of the 1970s (for
 example the ETA and the IRA) with the Pan-European thought [that is, non-existent]. Unfortunately it will take more than eight years before
 Europe starts to understand that al-Qaida doesn't work in favor of the Iraqis, just as the PKK doesn't work for the Kurds, the ETA for the
 Basques, or the IRA for the Catholic Church.

It might well happen that a shift from the policy of concessions to radical Islamists - which peaked in the Spanish election - towards general frustration and hatred against Islam will take place around 2012. First the Europeans will start to question the rationality of the overly general immigration policy. The popularity of leaders like Jörg Haider and Silvio Berlusconi is not over. The next thing to follow will be a wave of terrorism, which will first cause a reaction of panic, but gradually defiance will appear instead. The right-wing will adopt islamophobic and xenophobic themes, which will be combined with anti-Americanism. In this way, a new extreme right will be born, and it will get many supporters from the former extreme left. Haider, Berlusconi and Putin are the pioneers of this forthcoming path.

The ones to lose are the conservatives and liberals of the "Old Europe", as well as their ideological brothers who might be in power in the "New Europe". However, when the described thinking prevails among the ruling left and new extreme around 2012, the Baltic governments and other "New European" conservatives and liberals will raise anger in the "Old Europe" for their sympathies for the US, Free Iraq or the Chechens. They are treated as awkward troublemakers by the "Old Europe", which prefers to deal directly with Russia, deciding also about the fate of the Baltic countries and other borderlands with Russia, without endangering their good relations with Moscow, especially as the relations with the US have deteriorated. European great power politics will become increasingly dominated by the spirit of Tilsit, the Holy Alliance, the Berlin Congress, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, and Yalta.

When it was declared that the Cold War is over, a wave of moderate leftism wiped all across Europe, adopting an optimistic stand at future. Because of this, the seven years of hope in Russia were left unused, Russia's democratic development was not supported, the Chechen wars were not prevented, Afghanistan and Iraq were allowed to sink into tyranny, millions of refugees joined the immigrants and moved left, political mysticism favoring conspiracy theories gained foothold in Europe, and the European unification was not fulfilled in the best possible way.

When, after visitation, realism again started winning support, the traditional right wing (conservatives and liberals) started to win elections (surprisingly also in the US as early as in 2000), but the left wing managed to turn the situation by exploiting terrorism and the situation in the Middle East. Probably the right wing will recover and win crushing victories across Europe, but only after they have adopted fatal influences from the extreme left. This radicalization will be, in turn, responded by the left by radicalization, but meanwhile Russia will have a chance for a partial restoration of the Soviet system. The only hope for Europe to avoid this fatal polarization will lie in the ability and willingness of US Republicans to stay in power and to stay active in world politics. If the Americans withdraw into isolationism (like after 1918, in 1945-1946, and in early 1990s), the Pan-Europeans will have to stand alone the challenges of 2012.

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