

SAVING EUROPE

The news of the whole world -America, Asia, Australia, Africa- talk a lot about Europe lately. The main reason is the crisis of the Euro and the successive financial rescues that are taking place in order to solve the acute problems of the debts of Greece, Ireland and Portugal. The general perception of those non-Europeans who keep updated is that Europe is going through rough times but that it will get over them. Even today Europe is still regarded as the birth place of the Western Culture, the best economic and military ally of the US and, of course, a unique touristic destination, for it is a sort of a thematic live park where one can walk over the diverse stages of history.

Nevertheless, once the challenges that Europe is facing in the short and in the mid run are analyzed, the reasons for concern increase dramatically and go beyond the financial crisis and the lack of economic government for the single currency. What follows is the enumeration of Europe's most relevant problems:

The first one is, obviously, Europe's economic situation. The difficulties of Europe are not only related to the crisis of the Euro but to the blurry, non-concrete un-existing model for its future economic growth. No doubt that the banishment of the Euro (something that some people are fancying about) would bring huge ills to Europe, not only to the periphery economies

but also to the "central" ones, such as France's and Germany's; due to the big size of the European economy, the global impact would be tremendous, and the Great Depression that started back in 2007 would last much-much longer in the developed countries. Europeans are completely sure that they will never let that happen, mainly because there is much at stake to let the Euro fall. So it seems that the current circumstances will improve after the restructuration of the debt of the periphery countries, and after the empowerment of the mechanisms to establish a factual economic government.

What is more important is that, sooner than later, Europe will have to face a pending question that has been postponed for over a decade: the question is how it will recover its competitive advantage in the new global market, with the emerging countries as new actors. Europe needs to find the way to increase its productivity, to re-impulse its ability to produce innovation, to awaken its entrepreneur spirit, as well as to radically undertake necessary reforms of its labor laws and the welfare states. In the new global scenario Europe has to choices: either it persuades the emerging countries to adopt its social model whilst they also experience their economic growth, or it reshapes its own model in order to compete with China, India and Brazil in equal conditions.

Europe's second goal is a geostrategic one. For decades, the countries that today are Europe have tended to defend

separate, often divergent stances in most important political matters. This is what happened in the Bosnian war and in the second Iraq war, also in the first G-20 meetings after Lehman Brothers' fall, where each country defended its own ideas about how to properly respond to the chained collapse of the banks. We have recently seen again this disparity of opinions regarding the Arab Spring and the appropriateness of intervening in Libya.. The fact is that if Europe wants to remain influential to address issues as crucial as security, fight against poverty, climate change, commercial liberalization, financial stability and migration, it will have to speak with a single voice to the global community. The conformation of a single voice will require shrinking the foreign dimension of the Nation-States, something that will probably turn them into Region-States, similarly in a way to the United States of America. Besides, Europe will have to make severe administrative and political cuts within its internal institutions in order to reduce the number of the too-many, superfluous representatives, will also have to reinforce the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, finally, will have to diminish the European representation in the UN to one single chair.

Even if all of these striking improvements were made in a reasonable time, Europe would still have to define the geostrategic role it wants to play in the world. The only

chance of Europe would be to base its role on its strong points and on the comparative advantages it already has over any other regions. For example: while the USA is seen as the warrant of the world security and the land of opportunities, Europe could be seen as the mediator in conflicts between countries and the leader in the fight against poverty and climate change.

The third challenge Europe has to face, the first one due to its transcendent importance, is a demographic one. European population is ageing and communities that age too fast end up disappearing. The median age in Europe today is over 40 years old and almost 18% of the people are over 65 (it is expected to be 30% in 2060). Some countries, like Germany, have already started losing population and Europe will need 50 million new inhabitants (nationals and/or immigrants) to maintain today's productive capacity. This complicated situation is not easy to solve at all. European couples do not have more children because the working schedules make it difficult and the salaries are lower than years before (in relative terms). For some reason, European governments are not properly managing this problem, even though there is evidence that in those countries where the working conditions are better (the northern countries) there is a higher fertility rate.

Finally, Europe will have to review carefully its democratic system. At the national level the citizens are unhappy with

politics, they reject the closed, dark structures of the political parties and syndicates, they dislike the constant overexcitement and manipulation of the media, and they feel that their only chance to make their voices be heard is through their votes every 4-5 years, since any other ways to take an active part of the community are blocked. Even though some regions in Europe have opened new democratic doors based on the concepts of Open Government and Participative Budgets, the optimism has not lasted long and the efforts made by the administrations has be forgotten soon -oblivion in politics makes the policies disappear for the lack of demand-.

At the supranational level, Europe's democratic deficit is even worse. Less and less citizens understand what the European Parliament in Brussels stands for, since it does not vote for the President of the Union; neither they know what is the agenda of the European parties -which consist of a heterogeneous, inconsistent sum of the national parties-. The worse is probably this: Europeans see that the parties send to Europe their oldest, most annoying, superfluous or simply freakiest members. It is therefore urgent for Europe the instauration of a supranational government as soon as possible, for this will help out find efficient solutions for all its problems.

In these transitional times Europe needs to face very complex challenges, probably more complex than the ones faced by other

parts of the world, because it is an old continent that harbors precisely the (nowadays disgraced Greece as the) birth place of democracy. On the other hand, its accumulated privileges are good reasons to be optimistic: it has very well developed economies, deeply rooted democracies, some of the brightest world's intellectuals and politicians, as well as a proven ability to come over domestic and foreign confrontations and difficulties. Maybe Europeans have do not have in mind their real strength, but I am pretty sure that the sum of all these positive factors are more than enough to rescue Europe of the existential labyrinth it is trapped now.

AMY MARTIN