



The Geopolitics of Europe: Europe's Illusions and Delusions

August 3, 2015

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Abstract: This article contends that "Europe" is a term that describes a geographic reality that aspires to be a political one. Specifically, it highlights the illusions of unity and the delusions of international harmony that permeate Europe's politics today. It concludes by suggesting that the threat that Russia is presenting most immediately in Ukraine but more broadly to Europe as a whole is extremely serious and will alter in some form, hopefully positive, the European continent.

After an interlude of two decades, Europe is again at the center of geopolitical competition and turmoil. While Russia has returned to the European chessboard with violent determination, Europe is confused politically and incapable of a unified response. The explosion of Europe's southern frontier across the Mediterranean with the streams of illegal immigrants sailing northward has only underscored the divisions and inability to act strategically.

The problem is that European states do not seem to be aware fully of the geopolitical situation facing it. Europe, in fact, nourishes both an illusion and a delusion. While it lacks political unity and as a result it has no strategic coherence, it deludes itself that it does. Moreover, many in Europe embrace the delusion that they do not need a competitive strategy to deal with other powers because the outside world is on a path of convergence with the post-modern political vision of the West.

This combination of illusion and delusion is worrisome because European states are facing a series of threats, from the south and the east, that cannot be addressed but by them. Europe's security guarantor of the twentieth century, the United States, certainly will continue to play an important role for years to come, but it is unlikely to be willing or able to do so alone. To prevent those threats from festering and perhaps even from destroying the political and security edifice built in

Europe over the past half a century, Europeans will need to abandon their illusions and delusions.



(Map of Europe courtesy of U.S. Government.)

The Illusion of Europe

There is no such entity as Europe understood as a strategic actor. There is Europe as a geographic reality, a little promontory attached to Asia, with the Atlantic Ocean on its western side, the Mediterranean to its south, and the Urals, steppes and deserts on its eastern frontier. There also exists a deep and long tradition of Europe

as a civilization with roots in Athens, Jerusalem and Rome—reason, revelation, and political order based on law reflecting a higher divine order.¹ It is a civilization that aspires to unity on the basis of a recognition that politics ought to reflect natural law because, as Sophocles put it in *Oedipus the King*, “Great laws tower above us, [...] nothing mortal, no man gave them birth.”²

But these common geographic and civilizational features are not reflected in modern European politics, and in the end there is no Europe as one political actor. Of course, there is the European Union that claims to represent “Europe” or at least to be on the historic path to be such Europe, whole, peaceful and free. But that’s only a cruel illusion. Hence, the term “Europe” is adopted loosely in what follows, to define the geographic reality from the Atlantic to the Bug River (and perhaps, according to civilizational metrics, a few hundred miles farther east) that shares, for the most part, the European Union as well as its security underpinning, NATO, but it does not carry connotations of a unified political and strategic reality.

Europe is an illusion, or, to be more precise, Europe is affected by an illusion of unity and coherence. An illusion is the creation of a fake reality that may fool some but not all, and certainly not forever. It is something less than a delusion (of which more later) because there is a sense in the background that the illusion is not true, and there is an expectation that sooner or later it will vanish and reality will return. The risk is that an illusion may generate some elation early on, when its appeal has not had the time to be tested by reality (as, for instance, the illusion of wealth that one experiences perhaps with the purchase of a house through a mortgage, only to realize later on, when the illusion is broken by reality, that the bank owns it). Illusions can also lead to dangerous behavior because one may act on the basis of an assessment of one’s own power that is not consonant with the reality.

Europe’s illusion has been of unity and coherence, and the result was an overly ambitious policy of expansion. The appeal of this illusion is understandable because it arose out of a genuine desire to create a continent-wide polity that would subsume national differences. The goal was to prevent another cataclysmic war, *à la* World War I and World War II, which likely would have resulted in the end of the European civilization. In the decades after 1945, a few European nations decided to pool parts of their sovereignty starting from “coal and steel.”³ This early and limited project became increasingly more ambitious, aiming to establish a united Europe, a novel form of polity, with some functions maintained by states (e.g., army, fiscal policies, police force) while others centralized in EU institutions (monetary policies, economic regulations, legal frameworks). This is no place to retell the detailed story of the birth and growth of the European Union. However, the key point here is that Europeans, starting in the West and then in the East after 1989, nourished a strong

¹ Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2003); Christopher Dawson, *Understanding Europe* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2009).

² Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*, in Robert Fagles, trans., (New York: Penguin, 1984), pp. 957-963, p. 209.

³ Brendan Simms, *Europe* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), pp. 391-392, 410-412.

and understandable desire to seek ever greater unity.⁴ Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, there was a recognition that it was impossible for now to create a “Europe,” a single state under some sort of constitutional framework, but a gradual process of centralization—of legal procedures, of monetary policies, of foreign policy and so on—would eventually lead there. Unity was always on the horizon.

This was a pleasant illusion that found fertile grounds in Central and Eastern Europe. In fact, for those countries that rejoined Europe after 1989, the illusion of unity was perhaps even stronger because it was desired for so many decades and made unattainable by the dominating presence of Soviet troops. The EU promised not only an end to nineteenth century great power politics which often resulted in redrawing of maps and population transfers but also of massive wars and of a violent domination by a foreign power, namely Moscow. In brief, Europeans were in love with this illusion so much so that they did not want to see the reality—namely, the profound cultural, economic, political and historical differences among themselves.

In the end Europe’s unity and coherence is proving to be an illusion, and multiple events—from the euro crisis to the different policies toward Russia—are breaking it. Broadly, there are three related reasons why this progressive European unity (and resulting strategic coherence) has not been achieved.

First, there neither was nor is a European *demos* or nation. Unless imposed and maintained by sheer force and terror, any form of polity requires some underlying unity of the people under its authority. The illusion in Europe was that national histories, cultures, political styles, economic organizations, and threat assessments would not matter, or would quickly converge into a continent-wide identity. And above all, that people would consider themselves Europeans first, and French, Germans, Greeks or Italians as second—akin perhaps to the American model where people do have local affinity and allegiances but all are subsumed by a larger American identity. While many do indeed define themselves as European, that identity has not trumped the national one. The policies of national governments continue to be national first, European second.

The second reason for the illusion of European unity is the persistent refusal to acknowledge the common roots of Europe, that is, the Christian foundation of ideas of liberty and reason.⁵ This meant that the new European, or rather EU, identity had to be constructed without reference to that past. The EU project is a-historical, if not anti-historical, because it rejects European history on the basis of an incomplete and superficial understanding of it. The drive to a European unity was fueled by the desire to turn a page on the wars that wrecked Europe over the centuries: wars of “religion,” wars of “empires” and “imperialism,” wars of “nationalism” and wars of “ideologies.” The only safe historical and intellectual heritage was deemed to be the Enlightenment, with its faith in the inexorable progress of history, positing that the disagreements of the past would not matter in the future. The path to the future would be illuminated by a calculating reason cut off from transcendental truths and common to all irrespective of religious faith or

⁴ Mark Gilbert, *European Integration* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

⁵ George Weigel, *The Cube and the Cathedral* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

cultural bent. The result was a plan of European unity built on a promised future but on the denial of the common past.⁶

Finally, the third reason why the illusion of European unity is fraying stems from the economic foundation of the project. The denial of a common civilizational underpinning and the impossibility of establishing an immediate political union led to placing economic unity at the forefront. “Europe” would be created by breaking down barriers to trade and labor mobility, by establishing a single market and, more recently, by imposing a single currency. Had the desire to ease trade stopped at that, the project made sense. But this was not simply a David Ricardo-influenced plan to help comparative advantage bring its benefits to the trading partners; it was a first step in what was expected to be a political unity. This is where the plan went awry. It was mistaken to think that a common market would lead to a common people and a unified polity. It was founded on wrong anthropology because it assumed that we are all economic men and the underlying material conditions (the euro) would result in a shared constructed identity (the “European”). Few people really believed that Europe could be created on the basis of a common currency (those who did were truly delusional), but it was an illusion that was convenient to everyone: Germany was happy to have weaker countries in the euro to keep the currency from appreciating too much, and Greece, Spain or Italy for a while were thrilled at the ability to borrow cheaply.

Privileging economic union was also the wrong political move because it assumed—and this is related to the delusion mentioned later—that a unified polity could arise without considering the requirements of security. No state, however, can claim legitimacy and generate both support and allegiance among its people if it cannot provide security from external threats to them. Of course, this was not an issue in the 1990s as Europe went through a decade or more of blissful absence of threats, reinforcing the delusion of a world marching toward the historical endpoint of democracy and globalization.

It is different now when Europe’s frontier is exploding and all Europe has is the euro, the Schengen Agreement and an elaborate bureaucracy producing regulations.

The Delusion of Europe

While an illusion is a wrong perception of a reality that nonetheless is vaguely recognized, a delusion is a belief in a reality that does not exist. Delusions are results of one’s own fixed beliefs, and regardless of their foolishness, we trust that they are the reality. Europe’s delusion arises from the belief in the historical inevitability of a post-modern political reality in which, among others, power is no

⁶ It is ironic and tragic that while the EU frantically denies the Christian roots of European culture, ISIS is slaughtering Christians on the beaches of the Mediterranean to taunt Europe and to avenge purported offenses that the “religion of the West” has done against Islam. As Europe is wrong in denying its roots, so ISIS is mistaken in thinking that Europe, or the West in general, cares about slaughtered Christians.

longer national but is diffused inside some sort of global community; political competition is muted and state behaviors are harmonized through accepted international institutions; and the use of force is a rare aberration that is self-defeating for the actor that initiates it.

The main consequence of this delusion is a strategic culture—or perhaps even a grand strategy, a set of principles on how to act—of non-competition. Europe saw no necessity to fight for what it stood, for the rules it formulated and implemented, for the prosperity it promised, for the security it was blessed with. That is, Europe saw international relations within the EU but also without it as driven by large historical forces, such as the empowerment of the masses and of individuals combined with the globalization of economies that were weakening the modern national state in favor of transnational institutions and global governance.

The combination of a “global awakening” and the “economic globalization” meant two things. First, it was seen as a process that had no author, no maker, and was irresistible. Whoever stood in its path would sooner or later find himself defeated, abandoned by the international community, destitute in his autarkic stand, and in the end pressured from outside and from within to follow the path indicated by history.

Second, as a consequence, progress—made concrete by the expansion of the zone of prosperity and security under the institutional umbrella of the EU and NATO—required no fighting for it: it was a historical process, necessary and desirable, and universally appealing.⁷

There were good reasons to nourish such a delusion because states were eager to join these institutions, as made abundantly clear in the 1990s and in recent years, with the expansion of NATO and the gradual but continued extension of the EU and, to a lesser degree, of the euro to Central and Eastern Europe. This was not the expansion of an empire, achieved by marching troops to distant lands and by setting up colonial governments to rule over unwilling but supine subjects. It was an expansion by invitation and was greeted with joy.

The enlargement of the EU, in particular, appeared to occur without requiring a competitive strategy. Those leaders or states that initially opposed the march of progress could not do so for a prolonged period—so the delusion had it—and eventually they would be enticed to accept the inevitability of democracies, common markets, rule-based interactions, and diluted sovereignty. Geopolitical competition as traditionally understood—fights over specific territories, vying for control over domestic politics and economic forces, arms races, and ultimately, war—was a thing of the past simply because the various strategic actors would gradually but inevitably converge into harmonious relations. In fact, the EU saw its eastern policy toward Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and even Russia, as merely a continuation of the 1990s, a gradual and peaceful expansion of institutions without the necessity to engage in a competitive behavior with the powers (such as Moscow) that were seen as not yet ready but surely willing at some point to join.⁸

⁷ Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, “Europe’s Shattered Dream of Order,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2015.

⁸ The Eastern Partnership of the EU started in 2009 in the aftermath of the Georgia War, and

The famous saying by Seneca, “*Fata volentem ducunt, nolentem trahant*” (the fates lead the willing and drag the unwilling), aptly describes this delusion: history leads the willing and entices or forces those unwilling to accept it. Europe thought it was at the forefront of a historical wave and could limit itself to manage the technocratic details of progress. Front-page news indicates, of course, a different story.

Why Europe’s Illusion and Delusion is Dangerous

The lack of coherence and unity (the illusion) and the belief in a non-competitive and converging behavior of states (the delusion) are not necessarily dangerous to the states that espouse them. Divisions among states can be mitigated by institutions, commercial exchanges, or simply by the disinterest of the various parties involved. They may also not matter in a geopolitical environment where tensions are minimal due to the weakness of a potential rival—a condition that explains also the creation of the delusion mentioned earlier. For the past two decades this—namely, the fact that Europe’s incoherence had few geopolitical consequences as well as that the belief in a cooperative world coincided with a peaceful moment in history—was more or less the case. Europe was happily introverted, pondering its next institutional deepening or enlarging, managing its powerful new currency, and generally being oblivious to the world unless unpleasantly reminded by an interventionist United States eager to solve problems in Afghanistan and the Middle East.

It is different now. Europe is ringed by rising threats from the south and east, and there is relentless pressure, albeit of different nature, on its frontiers.

To the south, across the Roman *Mare Nostrum*, Europe faces a North African shore characterized by failed or weak states, from which emanate both a terrorist threat and an incessant flow of immigrants. The two may be related at times because there are fears that terrorist groups may seek to infiltrate Europe through these waves

the purpose was to bring several post-Soviet states (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) closer to the European Union. EU’s approach focused on the mechanisms through which these countries could come closer to EU standards, preparing an eventual promised but never offered accession through regulatory convergence. But, true to the delusion described here, the Eastern Partnership never considered the possibility of a competition with Russia; it was a bureaucratic plan, not a strategy. Some states, notably Belarus and Armenia, inched closer to Russia, joining the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union. The war in Ukraine, combined with a very aggressive policy by Moscow toward the other countries, has effectively ended any hope that the EU can expand in the region and made it clear that the EU was not prepared to compete with Russia. The May 2015 Riga Summit ended with anodyne statements that “the Eastern Partnership aims at building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased cooperation and is not directed against anyone. In this context, the Summit participants express their willingness to help rebuild trust and confidence on our continent.” Russia and Putin, the main culprits of the broken “trust and confidence,” were not mentioned. See Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/05/Riga-Declaration-220515-Final_pdf/.

of immigrants. More likely, as it has been proven in the past, terrorist groups find fertile ground in the thousands of immigrants (and often in the second generation of immigrants) living unassimilated on the margins of the European dream.

If one measure of instability is the number of human losses, this frontier is in complete disarray. In just two days in early April 2015, about 8,000 immigrants (including 450 children) on almost fifty boats were intercepted in the waters between Libya and Sicily (since the beginning of 2015, more than 16,000 immigrants have crossed that stretch of the Mediterranean; in 2014, a total of 170,000). These figures do not include the thousands that perish in the process. In one boat wreck alone as many as 500 perished, and 700 more in another a few days later in April 2015.⁹ Most of these immigrants are escaping war-torn states in North Africa and the Middle East, but some come from as far as Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹⁰ The scale of this tragedy is enormous. The southern frontier of Europe is facing a security threat that will require vast resources to contain and even larger resources, and a strong political will in Europe to engage in a long-term commitment to rebuild Libya and Tunisia, to resolve them.

Related to the flow of immigrants is the second threat to Europe, the Middle East. In part, the threat from the Middle East is connected to the challenge of immigration because the various wars in the Levant, Syria in particular, create flows of people trying to escape. It is also a source of battlefield skills and organization for Islamist terrorists, who are now attracted to the battlefields of the region but are likely to turn, or return, to Europe (from where many have joined the ranks of ISIS and other groups) once the fight in Syria or Iraq is over, becomes too difficult, or simply too tedious. Finally, the danger of a nuclear Iran is not an academic hypothesis but an increasingly more likely reality that affects Europe in a much more direct way simply because of geographic proximity. Unlike the United States, Europe may be within reach of the Iranian arsenal, creating a whole spectrum of unsavory scenarios to which Europe right now has no answer.

Finally, on Europe's eastern frontier, there is Russia.¹¹ Moscow presents the most traditional security menace: a land war of conquest.¹² Despite the various terms used to describe it (e.g., "hybrid war," "unconventional conflict" or "information warfare"), in the end Russia is employing artillery, tanks, and infantry to invade Ukraine, a European (geographically and civilizationally, even if not an EU member) state.¹³ The goal of Russia is not only to take over a piece of real estate and

⁹ "Naufragio, '400 morti al largo della Libia," *Avvenire*, April 14, 2015, <http://www.avvenire.it/Cronaca/Pagine/migranti-squali-palermo.aspx>.

¹⁰ "Mapping Mediterranean Migration," *BBC News*, Sept. 15, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24521614>.

¹¹ The threat of Russia antedates the 2014-15 war in Ukraine and was visible already in 2008. See Ronald Asmus, "Europe's Eastern Promise," *Foreign Affairs*, Jan./Feb. 2008.

¹² Phil Breedlove, "The Meaning of Russia's Military Campaign Against Ukraine," *Wall Street Journal*, July 16, 2014.

¹³ Moscow is not new at "unconventional" warfare. See Raymond Garthoff, "Unconventional Warfare in Communist Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1962. See also Janis Berzins, "Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy," National Defense Academy of Latvia, Policy Paper No. 2,

accumulate manpower—a nineteenth century concern that may certainly be an objective of Vladimir Putin, fearful of Russia's material decline—but to bring Russia back to a decision-making position inside Europe. Putin has made it clear that he considers the past two decades, characterized by a Russia in disarray domestically and ineffective internationally, as an unwelcome anomaly in Russian history that needs to be redressed. His idea of how Europe should function is manifest in the agreements negotiated in Minsk that established the very tenuous, and in reality nonexistent, ceasefire in eastern Ukraine: Russia and Germany (accompanied by France) negotiate the fate of another country, in this case Ukraine, which has no choice but to accept whatever the great powers decide. This procedure goes against the late twentieth-century European pretense that great powers do not matter, and in fact, that small states have an almost equal say in international relations and negotiations. There was certainly a great appeal in such a view, and the European Union promised its realization. Russia has destroyed that promise, and Europe's great powers are awakening to the hard reality of nineteenth century diplomacy.

This brief description of the threats is worrisome in itself. In its history, in fact, it is not often that the European continent had to face external threats on three fronts simultaneously. The periphery around Europe has quite literally exploded, especially if considered in light of the last two decades when there seemed to be no geographically proximate security threats. Now, there is a concomitance of threats, pushing into Europe in different ways: Russia with tanks and energy blackmail, Islam in its various permutations with terror and nuclear weapons, North Africa with immigration and chaos.

These fronts are obviously different but are linked. The most visible commonality is that Europe's response to all of them is effectively nonexistent. A unified strategy of the EU is absent, and at best individual states, the most affected by the particular threat, are thinking and preparing responses. But the outcome is that a single state's attempt to respond to Russian belligerence or to the Mediterranean immigrants is inadequate to the size of the problem. Moreover, the responses are by individual states and are often contrary to the interests of other European states.

Since the end of the Cold War, and arguably even before, many Europeans have lived in a geopolitical bubble, convinced that the postmodern rules and institutions established in Bruxelles were poised to conquer the world, but without having to do much for it to happen. Europe has subcontracted the wheeling and dealing of international politics to history. According to this worldview, the best strategy is one of patience, of simply waiting out the recidivist opponent who sooner or later would be forced to accept the benefits of transnational regimes, institutional rules, and global economics. States such as Russia or Iran are considered

<http://www.naa.mil.lv/~media/NAA/AZPC/Publikacijas/PP%2002-2014.ashx>; Nadia

Schadlow, "The Problem with Hybrid Warfare," April 2, 2015,

<http://warontherocks.com/2015/04/the-problem-with-hybrid-warfare/>; Jolanta Darczewska, *Anatomia Rosyjskiej Wojny Informacyjnej: Operacja Krymska* (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, May 2014).

obstreperous, relapsing to nineteenth century or even older ways, but are expected to realize soon enough that their posture is self-defeating in the twenty-first century. Of course, Europe is not alone in this view as the United States is also tempted to accept its premises. But Europe is closer geographically to the effects that such a delusion has allowed to fester, and the impact is seen much sooner.

In a nutshell, Europe has been deluded about the geopolitical reality surrounding the continent while it nourished the illusion in its capacity and willingness to compete in a coherent, unified, and effective way. As a result, Europe has ignored the Middle East, is letting North Africa simmer, and is desperately negotiating with Russia.



(Map courtesy of U.S. State Department.)

The Russian Threat to Europe

The effects of Europe's delusion and illusion are most visible in its relationship with Russia. Since the early 1990s, the expectation shared on both sides of the Atlantic was that Russia would eventually turn into a state like any other EU member: a "normal" state joining willingly the wider institutional setting with its rules applied to all, the transparency of its business transactions, and the abdication of military force to resolve the rare but still potential conflict of interest. Russia would become a partner, not a rival or a competitor, because of the attractiveness of the European model of politics and economics and the broader appeal of a global community of states.

EU enlargement was seen as an enticement to Russia to amend its ways and be on the right side of history, and not a challenge or a provocation that would lead to renewed competition on the European continent. Now we know that this was not the case. Without realizing it, the EU was competing with Russia about the political and economic future of specific states, control and influence over which Moscow was not willing to concede.

The mere fact of such a competition does not justify Russia's aggressive behavior toward Europe or in the invasion of Ukraine. Some have suggested that in the 2008 Georgia war and the 2014-15 Ukraine war, Moscow engaged in a legitimate response to the provocations of the West. The fault for the war was thus on the Western side.¹⁴ Such an argument blames the weaker victim for his demise and is historically baseless.¹⁵ The responsibility for Moscow's imperial aspirations and behavior rests squarely there, in Moscow.¹⁶ It is certainly open to debate whether the imperial and nationalist élan is limited to the Kremlin and its inhabitants of the day (Putin now, somebody else tomorrow) or is more widespread reflecting sentiments held by a large number of Russians. But whatever its sources, Russian behavior is wrong and needs to be stopped and prevented.

More importantly, a "blame the West" argument misunderstands Europe's profound mistake in dealing with Russia and more broadly in how it sees international relations. Europe stumbled into this conflict because of its delusion. Few in Europe expected a Russian invasion of Ukraine because few in Europe thought they were competing with Russia. The EU was right in opening the doors, however timidly, to further enlargement but it was mistaken in not being ready to fight for it. The EU should have been very careful in how it disbursed promises of enlargement because it is constitutionally incapable of competing and fighting to realize these promises. Or, to be more precise, the EU should not have extended to Ukraine distant promises of a possibility of joining the Union. This is the case, not because it was the wrong thing to do (it was right and it still is! Ukraine is part of Europe) nor because Russia has a legitimate sphere of interest (it does not!), but because it was unwilling to back these promises with a competitive strategy aimed at Russia. The fault of the West, thus, was not that it "provoked" Russia but that it did not compete with it.

It is possible that something good may come out of Moscow's belligerence. Russia's takeover of Crimea and the ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine have challenged the European delusion that the world, and Russia in particular, was converging

¹⁴ John Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs*, Sept./Oct. 2014.

¹⁵ See responses by Michael McFaul and Stephen Sestanovich to Mearsheimer's argument in "Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?" *Foreign Affairs*, Nov./Dec. 2014; Edward Joseph, "NATO Expansion: The Source of Russia's Anger?", *The National Interest*, May 1, 2014.

¹⁶ Mark Kramer, "The Myth of a No-NATO-Enlargement Pledge to Russia," *The Washington Quarterly*, April 2009, pp. 39-61; Christopher Clark and Kristina Spohr, "Moscow's Account of NATO expansion is a Case of False Memory Syndrome," *The Guardian*, May 25, 2015.

toward the EU-like model. But it has not shattered it. Delusions are difficult to break. In many European capitals there remains a strong desire to wait Russia out as if the war in Ukraine, combined with regular nuclear threats and daily flights of military planes near the airspace of NATO states, were a momentary temper tantrum to be followed soon by a renewed acceptance of the post-Cold War settlement in Europe. Hence, there is no political will to arm Ukraine, weapons being the only way to hinder Russian advances and to shore up the rule-based order at the frontiers of which Ukraine found itself.

The threat of Russia is, in fact, not simply a menace to the territorial status quo and the independence of one state (Ukraine, neither an EU nor NATO member) but to the very foundation of Europe as it has been constructed over the past several decades. Europe—the EU in particular, but also NATO—is in fact a set of rules, the most important of which is the respect of existing borders and the willingness to negotiate a conflict of interest without resorting to violence. Russia has clearly violated these rules, dismantling the military predictability that has characterized Europe over the past two or three decades. So far it has done this while incurring very little punishment, with the exception of targeted sanctions that will be difficult to maintain.

If Russia's war in Ukraine has not demolished completely the delusions of Europe, it has cracked its illusions. The war and the renewed threat from Moscow have shown deep cleavages on how the various states assess the threat of Russia, challenging the image of unity that Europe in its EU and NATO forms has cultivated.¹⁷ Geography plays a role because, as expected, those closest to a revisionist and assertive Russia are most worried while the states that are more distant—that is, most of Western Europe—are less interested in shoring up Europe's security and are bigger proponents of a search for a new diplomatic settlement with Moscow. What is more, the reactivation of other frontiers—most notably now the Mediterranean front with the flow of immigrants—diverts the attention of the most affected European states away from Ukraine and to their own shores. It is not surprising that Italy cares little about Ukraine while Estonia cares little about Libya.¹⁸

Russia targets the very functioning of the European model. By violently re-introducing itself into negotiations about Europe's future, Russia has positioned itself as the deal-breaker of many decisions affecting the geopolitics of the region. For now, Russia can decide the future of Ukraine, but the larger diplomatic system that is arising out of this war is one in which Russia can proclaim its silent veto over a much wider swath of EU's eastern frontier. The question dividing Europe concerns the proper role that Russia ought to play in European politics. For the Central European countries, from the Baltic to the Black Sea—with some differences to be sure—the overarching concern is that Russia will have a say in Europe's decisions, whether

¹⁷ John Vinocur, "Putin Begins to Crack the Atlantic Alliance," *Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 16, 2015.

¹⁸ Centrifugal tendencies in alliances are always present. See Robert A. Kann, "Alliances versus Ententes," *World Politics*, July 1976, p. 612. But in the case of today's Europe, the divergences between states are papered over by the apparent unity under the EU institutions (hence, the illusion).

concerning EU enlargement or the geographic disposition of NATO's military assets. This is clearly what Russia is aspiring to.¹⁹ For others in Europe, the concern is to prevent an escalation of the current conflict and to forestall a potential need to defend the most exposed EU and NATO members.

Russia, in an analogous fashion to the German approach in the 1920-30s, is banking on the guilt complex of many Western capitals.²⁰ There is, in fact, some ambivalence about NATO expansion (less so about EU enlargement, and if so, the remorse is more directed toward the southward extension of the Eurozone). The ambivalence, or guilt complex, is twofold. First, the expansion of NATO to Central Europe is seen as having brought Europe closer to Russia, thus provoking Moscow that considered that region as its sphere of influence. It was an unnecessary "victory lap" after the miraculous 1989-91 years. Second, now that the region is in, it may also be indefensible, in particular the Baltic states. In brief, the sentiment in some capitals of Europe is that NATO enlargement was a mistake and the best way to atone for it is by seeking a new settlement with Russia. So far, the new settlement negotiated with Russia includes Ukraine, until now only a potential member of the EU: Crimea is lost for now, and Eastern Ukraine is unlikely to be under control of Kiev anytime soon. The question is whether there will be a new order renegotiated with Russia that incorporates existing NATO and EU members.

The broken illusion of unity may turn into a real sense of cohesion and union. A continued and violent Russian push westward, against NATO and the EU, may convince Europeans to tighten their ranks and present a more unified front, which cannot but be based on a return to the foundations of Western civilization until now ignored.²¹ It may also end the delusion that there is little need to provide for their own security and for engaging in a geopolitical competition with Russia and other rivals on the horizon. This, too, must be based on an understanding that the achievements of Western civilization are worth promoting and protecting with deeds. The resurgence of Russian imperialism may, therefore, break Europe's delusions about the world while turning its illusion of unity into reality.

Europe's geopolitical map is characterized by a broken illusion—of unity, of coherence, of a Europe acting as one—and a weakened but not destroyed delusion—the faith in the progressive march of history. The question is whether the illusion will turn into reality and the delusion will be fully defeated.



¹⁹ Vladimir Socor, "Russia's Master Plan to Break the Trans-Atlantic Alliance," *Wall Street Journal*, April 20, 2015.

²⁰ Lilia Shevtsova, "Humiliation as a Tool of Blackmail," *The American Interest*, June 2, 2015.

²¹ "Western history [...] is the clash of nations, but it is also a universal, a common quest. There is a vertical history of national rivalries; there is a horizontal history of the West. It is the latter history which sets forth the common unity of events in which all Western peoples participate." Robert Strausz-Hupé, *The Zone of Indifference* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1952), p. 11.