

# Perhapsburg

## What the European Union Is and Isn't

*A. Wess Mitchell*

When the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States assumes office in January, he will be the 12<sup>th</sup> consecutive occupant of the White House to offer rhetorical, if not entirely sincere, support for the economic and political integration of Europe. He will probably not be the first to wonder just what all this support and, more importantly, Europe's own exertions have actually amounted to. He won't be alone. So peculiar is the neither-here-nor-there character of the European Union's global political profile that opinion about its provenance falls everywhere on the spectrum from zenith to nadir. Thus Parag Khanna claims that Europe is set to become the essential great power in an unfolding global Concert that it will manage not as America's helpmeet, but as its peer.<sup>1</sup> But Gideon Rachman argues that, far from being a great power, the European Union is a "Giant Switzerland"—a geopolitical deadweight that neither wants nor needs to play a role in the global balance of power.<sup>2</sup>

What both authors share, with their respective forebears Charles Kupchan and Robert Kagan, and with virtually every other analyst who has rolled the bones in the Great Europe Debate, is the assumption that the nations of Europe will choose, *ab intra*, their own geopolitical destiny. What they all ignore is the influence that other great powers exert, *ab extra*, on

EU political outcomes. Preoccupied with the impact that the European project will have on the international system, these authors fail to consider the impact that the international system will have—indeed, is now having—on the European project.

The European Union is not a normal great power that simply needs to wrap up a few residual referenda, nor is it or an introverted but largely independent giant Switzerland. Rather, the European Union is likely in coming years to be a theoretically powerful but crisis-prone second-rate power caught in an unending geopolitical tug-of-war between other poles in the international system. Such an entity can neither lead the system, as Khanna would like, nor hide from it, as Rachman would have it. To turn Khanna's Concert analogy to its proper use, the European Union is likely to resemble not 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain or Germany, but their palsied polyglot neighbor, the Austro-Hungarian

<sup>1</sup>Khanna's *Second World* (Random House, 2008) is one of the latest in a growing literature arguing the "Great Power Europe" thesis. See also John McCormick, *The European Superpower* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); Rockwell A. Schnabel, *The Next Superpower?* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Mark Leonard, *Why Europe Will Run the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (PublicAffairs, 2005); T.R. Reid, *The United States of Europe* (Penguin, 2004); and the book that started it all, Charles Kupchan's *The End of the American Era* (Knopf, 2002).

<sup>2</sup>Rachman, "Irrelevance, Europe's Logical Choice", *Financial Times*, May 19, 2008.

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Empire: surrounded, geopolitically polygamous and predisposed to dependency on, if not submission to, a powerful neighbor.

The challenge such a Europe could pose for U.S. policy is very different from anything Washington currently anticipates. It is neither the challenge of strategic retrenchment to make room for a great power Europe nor the challenge of patiently coaxing a “Swiss Europe” out of its strategic shell, but of preventing a strategically sandwiched “Hapsburgian Europe” from becoming a *de facto* strategic appendage of Russia. While preventing this outcome will not require the United States to fight a new Cold War, it will require engagement in a long and hopefully quiet diplomatic game for the strategic heart and soul of Europe—a game we thought we had already won when the Berlin Wall came down. To succeed at this, Washington will need an approach radically different from any it has used in the past. While not foreclosing the possibility of eventual EU cooperation, the next administration should make it a priority to deepen America’s bilateral links with the European Union’s staunchest Atlanticist powers. None of these are core EU members, most are small eastern newcomers, and all have been wounded by Washington’s mismanagement of alliances since the Iraq war. Starting in January, America should move decisively to revitalize these relationships as the first step toward a new strategy explicitly aimed at keeping Europe Atlanticist. The blueprint for this strategy should come not from George Kennan’s playbook for handling the Soviet Empire, but from Otto von Bismarck’s for handling the Habsburgs.

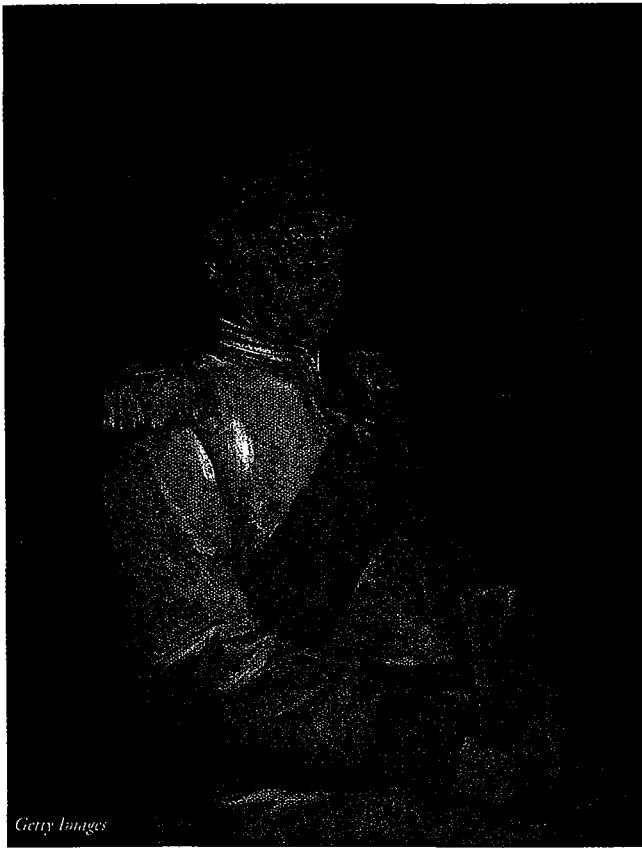
## Not Just a Game

Anyone who has ever played *Diplomacy*, the classic board game of pre-1914 European statecraft, can tell you that one great power in the game is different from the rest. Watch a group of experienced players (Henry Kissinger is a big fan, as was John F. Kennedy), and you will see plenty of volunteers to play the part of Britain, offshore and aloof; Germany, central and impregnable; or Russia, vast and unassailable. Some will even be willing to play the decrepit Ottoman Empire,

crouched in the lower right-hand corner of the board, just for the fun of it. But no one wants to play as Austria-Hungary. There it sits, at the center of the board, a finger in every strategic pie but not able to hold its own. Everything seems to be stacked against the Austrian player: He has fewer pieces than he needs to win, but his real estate, too valuable for his neighbors to ignore, is too central for him to be able to hide. Worst of all, he is wedged between the game’s two strongest powers. In a way, the Austrian player seems to be commanding a sham great power—one that only the nimblest of “diplomats” can maneuver into a winning position.

If a modern-day version of *Diplomacy* existed, the European Union would occupy Austria’s position on the game board. In a five-player 21<sup>st</sup>-century game with, say, the United States, the European Union, Russia, China and India, the European Union would confront a strategic problem altogether alien to the other players but instantly recognizable to the statesmen of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Austria. For beneath Austria’s pale red coat lies a simple geopolitical fact that has been almost entirely ignored in the debates about the European Union’s strategic future: A multinational union is fundamentally different from other great powers *irrespective of how politically integrated it may become*. Its internal and external success—indeed, its very existence—is inextricably tied up in the actions and wills of other powers. This presents the European Union with a predicament that could be framed as follows: Internal Division + Relative Decline = Geopolitical Dependency.

Like Austria before it, the European Union is composed of multiple political units, almost every one of which lies within the geostrategic orbit of an external power. This is not just another statement of the kind that serves as the starting point for most analyses of the European Union (“Europe has many voices”), nor is the essence of the problem the longstanding reluctance among Europe’s countries to relinquish control over foreign policy. Rather, the problem inheres in the strategic affinities (mostly geographically derived, some psycho-historical, many permanent) that exist between the mostly small and mid-sized powers inside the EU project on the one hand, and larger powers on the outside on the other.



Otto von Bismarck, 1871

For the European Union, the most important of these flanking great powers are the United States and Russia. For Austria-Hungary, they were Germany and Russia. And as both Austrian and recent EU history show, when a polyglot power finds itself between two large, monolithic, self-interested great powers, it finds itself being pulled apart at the seams. This is as much a result of intentional policy choices on the part of the flanking powers as it is the work of unintentional, or “blind”, structural forces.

The intentional factors tend to get the most attention. Few things exercise EU officials more than perceived U.S. attempts at “disaggregating” the union, such as Washington’s courtship of “New Europe” during the Iraq war. However, the remarkable thing is not that the United States leaned on these bilateral links; Rumsfeld’s infamous “Old Europe” comment was a clumsy scramble for allies, not a cynical ploy to undermine European unity. The remarkable thing was that the United States worked so long and hard to build the European Union up in the first place. Our six-decade policy of support

for integration is a geopolitical anomaly—one of perhaps only two occasions in history in which a great power has knowingly abetted the rise of a potential peer competitor (the first occasion was Bismarck’s policy toward Austria-Hungary).

The real disaggregator, however, is not the United States but Russia. In recent years, Moscow has used what a recent report from the European Council on Foreign Relations called “coercive bilateralism” to systematically penetrate and fragment the EU project. Unlike U.S. policy, which recruits *ad hoc* “coalitions of the willing” to accomplish specific, short-term goals against a genuinely pro-integrationist policy backdrop, Russia’s aim is to establish permanent pathways of dependency that will enable Moscow to either block the emergence of a unified European geopolitical actor altogether or, to the extent that such an actor does congeal, to have so many threads in the EU rug as to be able to

pull it out from under any common EU policies that would harm Russian interests.

This is roughly similar to the approach that Czarist Russia used with Austria-Hungary. Much as Moscow now seeks to penetrate the European Union through partnerships with powerful members like Germany and former satellites like Slovakia and Bulgaria, St. Petersburg once penetrated the Habsburg Monarchy by cultivating a cadre of pro-Russian groups within the Empire, including most notably the Czechs, South Slavs and Ruthenes. Disaggregation is as irresistible a policy instrument for a Russia coping with an internally divided European neighbor today as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**B**ut even if neither Russia nor America ever made an overt attempt at disaggregation, the European Union would still have a serious problem on its hands, for the European dilemma is structural in nature. EU member states have always sought the backing of powerful external patrons to augment their positions in the intra-EU balance of power. The European Union’s fringes, the new Central European

member states plus Britain and the Scandinavians, turn to Atlanticism; the core, Germany, France and their respective satellites, sees its advantage in Eurasianism.

The existence of these deeper geographical and historical links among key EU members and outside powers has been largely obscured for the past sixty years, first by the artificial lines of the Cold War and then by the near-monopoly of Atlanticism that followed in its wake. However, they will become more evident as the Cold War recedes into memory. The bidirectional gravitational pull they exert will work against efforts to build an intra-EU strategic consensus. And contrary to what many European and U.S. policymakers believe, this problem, because it is structural, will continue to exist no matter how politically unified the European Union appears to become on paper. It haunted Austria-Hungary, a power that actually possessed until its dying day the kind of centralized control over foreign policy decision-making that the European Union thinks will cure its strategic ills.

Surviving these disaggregating forces is only possible in a highly permissive international environment. Other great powers have to want their multinational colleague to exist; at a bare minimum, they must not actively work against its efforts at internal cohesion. And even if they take a generally benevolent view of integration, they must exercise continual self-restraint in foregoing the virtually irresistible temptation to disaggregate it for short-term gain. They are only likely to do this if they see some benefit to themselves and perhaps to the wider international system in the polyglot player's role.

This is precisely how the United States has viewed the European Union and its precursors for the past six decades. And so Europe is again following in the footprints of Austria-Hungary, which was widely viewed among the other great powers, in Metternich's famous quip, as a "necessity"—an irreplaceable stabilizing agent without which the European balance of power would not function properly. Austria's peers valued its existence much as the players of *Diplomacy* do, and much as the United States values the European Union today: By filling a potentially destabilizing geopolitical vacuum at the center of the game board, both entities check

the appetites of Germany and Russia to expand their territory, influence or both.

## Geriatric Greatness

But for both Austria-Hungary and the European Union to retain their status as "necessary" powers requires one thing above all else: strength. While geopolitical decline presents severe challenges for any great power, it is especially perilous for a multinational state. Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Austria underwent a slow but steady process of economic, military and demographic enervation that left it in a state of perpetual geriatric greatness in relation to the other powers. Decline eventually stripped Austria-Hungary of its status as a necessity in the other powers' eyes as its capacity for independent action eroded and its dependence on other poles in the system grew. Both of these symptoms are now observable in the European Union.

The European Union is well on its way to becoming one of the weakest powers—in some dimensions, *the* weakest power—in the unfolding multicolor system. Militarily, the European Union spends only 1.7 percent of its GDP on the armed forces (compared to 3.6 percent in Russia and 4.0 percent in the United States). Economically, the European Union is expected to account for only 12 percent of the world economy by 2050, compared to 20.3 percent for the United States and 24.1 percent for China. The reason is largely demographic; the European Union's population is expected to drop by thirty million people by 2050, compared to the growth of 116 million in that period for the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Not only will such a Europe be incapable of leading the international system; it will be incapable of doing much on its own at all. Its military impotence is well documented, but what is

<sup>3</sup>*Confronting Demographic Change: A New Solidarity Between the Generations*, European Commission, March 16, 2005; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Database of Military Spending; "World Trade in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", *Institut Français des Relations Internationales*, May 2003.

less often stressed is how the European Union's "hard power" deficit impairs its ability to use "soft power." Try to imagine the European Union a dozen or so years from now tackling a major global issue by itself. If another tsunami were to devastate the South Pacific, the European Union's shortage of strategic lift capabilities could prevent it from delivering aid. If Iran goes nuclear, the European Union lacks the regional clout and hard power for its diplomats to be taken seriously in Tehran. Similarly, if an opening presented itself for Israeli-Palestinian peace, neither side would accept the European Union as sole broker and guarantor of the ensuing arrangement, for neither side could count on the European Union to limit the risks they would have to take to achieve a settlement.

Not even the European Union's supposed geopolitical trump card—the ability to export itself in the process of taking on new members—is likely to provide a prop for European geopolitical influence over the long term. The problem the European Union faces with enlargement is the same one that Austria faced when it tried to absorb new communities at the turn of the past century: Russia. It was a comparatively easy task to absorb the countries of Central Europe when Russia was geopolitically reeling and economically prostrate; it is a far more difficult proposition when the target countries are further east and Russia is geopolitically resurgent and flush with petrodollars. We have seen this already in the way the April 2008 Bucharest Summit came apart over the prospects of Georgia and Ukraine joining NATO, and we have certainly seen it in the core EU reaction to the Russo-Georgian war of this past August.

If this were the full extent of the European Union's dilemma, things wouldn't be that bad. At the worst, it might mean the European Union was in fact becoming a "Giant Switzerland" with no desire or need to play a role in the wider world. Interestingly, the prospect finds a parallel to Austria-Hungary's strategic debates in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when some of its leaders hoped to shelter their ailing empire from the rough-and-tumble world of geopolitics by assuming the role of a "super-Switzerland."<sup>4</sup>

Their attempt at strategic hiding failed for many of the same reasons that it would fail for the European Union. Irrelevance, it turns out,

is not a luxury that a strategically sandwiched, geopolitically declining, multinational great power can afford. It is fated to be either a geopolitical necessity or a geopolitical hindrance—there is very little room in-between. As Austria discovered, other powers will not allow a state like it to achieve geopolitical nirvana. They covet its constituent parts—even if in penny-packet, cherry-picked form—to bolster their own positions. This is, after all, what multipolar geopolitics and diplomacy are all about. Stalked by internal division and unremitting decline but still determined to play the part of a first-rank player, the multinational great power easily falls prey to strategic dependence on one of the other poles in the system. Confronted with a widening power gap and a more assertive Russia in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Vienna became increasingly dependent on Germany to back up Austria's position in the European balance of power. As the years passed, Austria found that it lacked the strategic asset that Germany possessed in abundance: military power.

Realizing the leverage that Austria's addiction to German military sponsorship gave him, Kaiser Wilhelm sought to maneuver Austria into a position of strategic fealty. In the end, Vienna found it could do little abroad without Berlin's consent, even as the rise of ethno-nationalism within sapped its strength and unity. Once it became clear to the other great powers that Austria was merely a strategic extension of Germany, its status as a "necessity" evaporated. The system that had for so long made its existence possible turned against it, breaking the Empire into nine countries at Versailles.

Historical analogies have their limits, of course, but there are similarities between the basic problem of geopolitical dependency that confronted Austria-Hungary and the one that now confronts the European Union. Most Europeans, to the extent they even recognize this danger, say the power they are apt to be dependent on is the United States. In fact, they are more susceptible to dependence on Russia.

<sup>4</sup>F.R. Bridge, *The Habsburg Monarchy Among the Great Powers, 1815–1918* (Berg Publishers, 1991), pp. 2–3.

A growing literature now grapples with the technical, commercial and policy implications presented by the addiction of EU countries to Russian energy supplies (in some countries, as high as 100 percent). What that literature tends to miss, however, is how this phenomenon could eventually affect the European Union's behavior as a unified geopolitical actor. If Austria's experience is any guide, dependence on a powerful neighbor for a vital strategic resource presents the supplier with a virtually irresistible tool for influencing the recipient's behavior in other policy areas. Russia's growing leverage over key EU member states could thus erode the foundations of Atlanticism in Europe. From the perspective of many European countries, the Russian side looks more attractive than the U.S. one. The reason is simple: The strategic resource Moscow provides, energy, is more immediately and obviously essential to the needs and interests of EU states and citizens than the military-security umbrella the United States provides.

That is not to say that Europe no longer values the Transatlantic relationship. It merely means that, in what appears to most Europeans to be a post-military age, the core geopolitical service this relationship provides—protection—matters less than it once did. And while they may continue to value their U.S. security link as an insurance policy, European capitals know that Washington will never use it as a source of leverage: Even if Europe pursues policies that defy American wishes, there is no danger that the United States will retaliate by rescinding NATO's Article 5 security guarantee.

By contrast, Russia's leverage over Europe is more flexible. It is all too easy to imagine Moscow threatening to shut off the westward flow of gas in order to influence the foreign policy decisions of key European states, because it has already happened elsewhere. A recent report by the Swedish Ministry of Defense found that Russia had interrupted the supply of energy for political reasons on 55 occasions between 1992 and 2006, while an Estonian report found 41 examples of Russia tying political demands to energy deliveries.<sup>5</sup>

Russia doesn't even have to shut off the gas. The overwhelming importance of energy as a

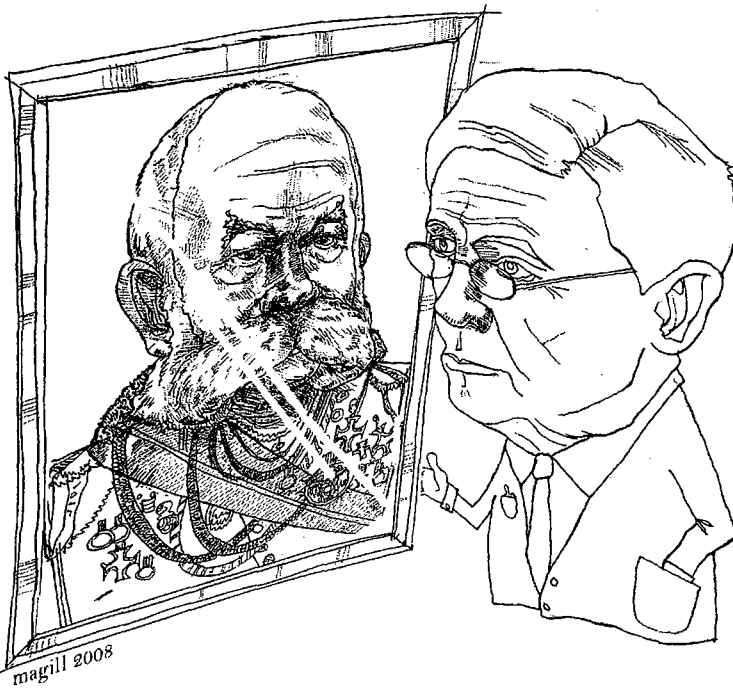
strategic and economic commodity, together with the value of the business relationships it generates, creates a strong deterrent for EU governments to defy Russia in the first place. A recent report by the European Council on Foreign Relations found that, of the European Union's 27 member states, 16 have been recruited into what might be loosely called the Russia lobby.<sup>6</sup> This group includes the four largest continental powers—the political and economic backbone of the European project. It also includes key transit states needed to maintain supply links to the EU core without fear of obstruction from less-friendly Central European members. And most importantly, it includes Germany—Europe's most important geopolitical actor, the biggest contributor of money to the European Union and increasingly Russia's closest friend in the European project.

The link being forged between Moscow and Berlin has the potential to profoundly alter the Atlantic order as we know it. Deep and mutual, it represents the re-emergence of an age-old affinity between the largest Eurasian and European power centers—a relationship that neither begins nor ends in modern energy and business ties. Historically, the search for a durable template for coordinating German (or Prussian) and Russian foreign policies has engaged the attention of leading geopolitical thinkers in both countries since at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, Germany is Russia's biggest trade partner, its largest market for Russian gas and its "gateway" for politically infiltrating the European Union. And Germany likes it this way. As Edward Lucas details in *The New Cold War* (2008), both sides of the German political establishment have a stake in perpetuating

<sup>5</sup>John Vinocur, "Europe's unlikely attempt to renew a 'partnership' with Russia", *International Herald Tribune*, April 21, 2008.

<sup>6</sup>Of these 16, two "are willing to veto common EU positions" on Russia's behalf, four "enjoy a special relationship with Russia which occasionally undermines EU policies" and ten "put their business interests [with Russia] above political goals [of the EU]." See Mark Leonard and Nick Popescu, "A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations", European Council on Foreign Relations (2007).



**Franz Josef and Javier Solana: Mirror images?**

and expanding this increasingly profitable but asymmetric relationship: the Right for reasons of business, the Left for reasons of ideology. This fact is virtually guaranteed to re-orient German foreign policy preferences. It is already doing so gradually. Berlin's opposition to U.S. efforts to offer a MAP (Membership Application Program) to Ukraine and Georgia, its resistance to European attempts to liberalize the EU energy market and its opposition to calls for an EU peace mission to Moldova were all decisions that Germany's leaders made with the Russian position foremost in their calculations.

This trend is likely to get stronger with time because it represents structure reinforced by profit. In recent years, leading members of the Social Democratic party have appeared to lobby for Germany to seek a position of geopolitical "equidistance" between Washington and Moscow. Were Germany to actually pursue equidistance as a matter of policy, it would become the single most significant geopolitical development in Transatlantic relations since the 1950s.

As upsetting as Germany's new mindset may be to the new EU member states of Central Europe, equidistance is far more likely than their traditional Atlanticism to become the dominant strategic paradigm in a united

seats in the Parliament (compared to 269 Atlanticist seats).

In short, as the European Council report concluded, in the EU-Russia relationship "it is the Kremlin that puts issues on the agenda . . . and increasingly defines the rules of the game." This is not meant as a criticism of Russia; indeed, Moscow is simply (and effectively) doing what intelligent powers should do: secure their interests as far into the future as possible. Nor should Russian strength be overstated. Despite new signs of vitality—its growing budget surplus and hard currency reserves, shrinking debt, and a six-fold increase in military spending—Russia is not as strong as Europe in most categories of power. Its main prop of influence, energy, will not last forever. Nevertheless, it does enjoy a powerful source of leverage whose geopolitical potential is only beginning to be realized. How this leverage works can be seen in the recent Georgia crisis, when dependency on Russian energy helped dissuade core EU states from joining Washington in a tougher diplomatic line against Moscow. As French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said, "Sanctions by those who supply are very different than sanctions by those who are on the receiving end and who can't close the tap."

Europe. Even if the European Union manages to devise a long-sought common policy on energy security, the content of this policy is more likely to reflect the watered-down form favored by its biggest members than the aggressive liberalization sought by many Atlanticists. A quick breakdown of the power balance in the European Union reveals why. Together, the 16 "Russia partners" in the European Council on Foreign Relations report hold 211 votes in the European Council (compared to 134 for the 11 Atlanticists) and 463

Russia has thus managed to become what Yevgeny Bendersky calls a “superpower on the cheap”, a power able to build “credible alliances to share the costs of global influence, instead of paying these costs themselves, as the Soviet Union did in the Cold War.”<sup>7</sup> And nothing could serve as a more credible geopolitical force multiplier than Europe. This is unlikely to result in the Gaullist European counterweight of which some conservative commentators have warned. Instead, for a mental picture of how an eastward-looking Europe might behave in practice, imagine Germany’s recent Russo-sensitive obstructionism on a grander scale. Geopolitically, the European Union could become a “negationist” power—a power that, while not overtly hostile to U.S. aims, is unwilling to take risks in support of them. Its effect on the international system would be like a geopolitical shock absorber sapping the momentum of any U.S. policies that run contrary to Russian interests, but without providing a constructive or viable alternative to American leadership.

## The American Dilemma

This is a very different kind of Europe from anything U.S. policymakers are currently expecting to manage in the years ahead. The challenge it would present is not that of a European Union that is strong and independent-minded or a Union that is weak and self-absorbed (yet still in control of its destiny), but a Union that is both weak and dependent on actors other than the United States.

This presents a problem that the European Union is unlikely to be able to handle on its own. Austria solved it only briefly under Metternich, who managed to bind Russia and Prussia to Austria in a system of common values (the Holy Alliance) which, by artificially magnifying Austrian power, delayed the lurch toward dependency. Such a course will almost certainly be unavailable to the European Union, which faces a decidedly uphill battle to bind Putin’s Russia into the Euro-Kantian value system.

Nor is U.S. policy configured to cope with Europe’s growing predicament. Ask a leading

U.S. foreign policy analyst for a description of the main problem facing the United States in Europe, and he is likely to say that Europe will not be strong enough to assist with the burden of U.S. global leadership. Ask what we should do about this, and he will say, “Encourage Europe to integrate.” For example, in a 2005 *Foreign Affairs* article, three prominent American experts wrote that the next administration should “empower” the European Commission, presumably by talking over the heads of EU member states if necessary.<sup>8</sup>

While there is no doubt that America needs Europe’s help in the world, the problem is that U.S. policymakers, looking for the shortest path to obtaining that help, have become mesmerized by the simplest policy solution at their disposal: European unity. It will not avail, not least because while waiting on the European Union to congeal, Russia has skillfully courted the most powerful and influential EU powers, laying the groundwork for an asymmetric strategic relationship that could endure for decades. Whereas Washington has focused on the *fact* of integration and worked to hasten its advent, Moscow has focused on the *content* of integration and worked to ensure that whatever unified or semi-unified Europe does emerge will magnify rather than undermine Russian interests.

The time has come, therefore, to rethink America’s approach to Europe. While we should not meddle in the inner workings of the project so much as to strangle it, we cannot stand by while Russia dominates the game board. For the first time in the history of U.S.-EU relations, we must devise a strategy for ensuring that a united Europe, if and when it emerges, shares our fundamental interests.

Otto von Bismarck’s plan for dealing with Austria-Hungary could show us what such a strategy would look like. Far from being outdated, it is possibly the only case in history in which a

<sup>7</sup>Bendersky, “Russia’s Future Foreign Policy: Pragmatism in Motion”, *Power and Interest News Report*, May 4, 2005.

<sup>8</sup>Antony J. Blinken, Philip H. Gordon and Ronald D. Asmus, “Nothing to Fear: Washington Should Embrace the European Union”, *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2005).



power strategically resembling today's America attempted to influence the geopolitical complexion of a power resembling today's European Union. In dealing with this declining, strategically sandwiched, dependency-prone neighbor, Bismarck managed to strike a balance between supporting integration and preventing competitors from gaining the upper hand in the project's internal balance of power. His secret was to encourage within the Empire a self-regulating balance that would produce favorable policy outcomes. He did this by cultivating, from 1867 onwards, "institutionally embedded allies"—a cadre of nationalities within the integration project whose vision for Austrian interests aligned with his own.

The United States should imitate this strategy, creating an institutionally embedded base of support within the European Union. While all European states are "Atlanticist" in the broadest sense, certain EU powers—Poland, the Czech Republic, the Baltic states, Romania, Britain, the Netherlands and Denmark—share a stronger strategic affinity for the United States than other EU members. The United States, however, has not made the most of the geopolitical advantages presented by this strategic affinity. We have failed to draw meaningful policy distinctions between them and other, less supportive EU states. Worst of all, we have failed miserably to reward the frequent and costly support they have provided for U.S. policies. If we do not change course, in ten years' time this base of support may no longer exist.

Thus the next administration should launch an effort to systematically engage these allies, not for help in a specific crisis, but to construct a permanent, institutionally embedded Atlanticist core around which to build a pro-U.S. consensus in EU decision-making. Three lessons from the Bismarckian playbook may be particularly helpful.

1. *Make the United States as attractive a patron as possible.* The brilliance of Bismarck's management of Austria-Hungary lay in his selection of key allies—most notably, the Magyars, who were already drawn to Berlin for structural reasons. He simply reinforced these pre-existing tendencies by encouraging and rewarding their friendship.

U.S. performance in this category has been

dismal. In six years, the Bush Administration has done more to erode the foundations of Atlanticism than Russian energy maneuvers could do in twenty. The record of U.S. "alliancecraft" is especially disappointing in Central Europe, where Washington's failure to reward arch-Atlanticists for their assistance in Iraq has left even stalwarts like Poland deeply embittered. Though the Georgia crisis appears to have brought a momentary improvement in relations, these states are still less likely than before to support the United States in the next faraway crisis or to weigh in on Washington's behalf inside the European project. If "New Europe" was supposed to be our Trojan Horse, we knocked its legs out from under it before the gates of Troy ever swung open.

The next president must regain the trust of "New Europe." His first priority should be to mend fences with Warsaw, Prague, London and Amsterdam (without ignoring Berlin and Paris). He should offer a package of strategic perks to reward, and retain, our closest friends in the European Union. For Central Europe, this might involve the creation of a generous new fund within the Foreign Military Funding program specifically earmarked for them. In addition to reversing the image of U.S. stinginess that took root during negotiations on missile defense, such a move could provide a vehicle for the strengthening of Central European militaries that some analysts argue is needed in the wake of the Russian invasion of Georgia. Whatever form it takes, the message must be strong enough to retain the EU states that chose, at a risk of political isolation, to expend blood and treasure to support the United States in its recent policy initiatives. We have to show that it still pays to be friends with the United States.

2. *Encourage Atlanticist states to seek leadership roles in the European Union.* Bismarck knew that it was not enough simply to have friends inside the Austrian integration project; he also had to make sure those friends' voices were heard. The United States should similarly be wary of efforts to marginalize its closest allies in EU institutions. Many officials in Brussels and other West European capitals want to form an institutional avant-garde around Germany, France, Italy and Spain to press ahead in key

areas of integration, leaving the other powers to catch up. From the standpoint of U.S. interests, such an arrangement would be fine as long as it is clear that the core group speaks only for the core group. We should resist an arrangement in which the Union as a whole is led by a handful of its largest states, while the powers of the Atlanticist rim are under-represented. Our comfort level with the Union should increase in direct proportion to the strength of their voices within its structures. While Washington should not seek to rig intra-EU institutional outcomes (which would only backfire), it should encourage Atlanticist capitals to seek leadership roles within the integration project, as, for example, in the recent Polish-Swedish "Eastern Initiative", and it should also encourage them to make full use of the expanded provisions under the Lisbon Treaty to create their own pioneer groups.

3. *Speak up for Atlanticist powers standing against Russia, even when Brussels will not.* Bismarck cemented the link with his cadre of friends inside the Austrian integration project by making it clear he would protect them from Russia even if Vienna did not. Similarly, U.S. policy should back up its closest allies in future crises. The failure of the European Union to take a strong position in support of Estonia in the face of Russian reprisals during the 2007 crisis over the World War II monument, or to answer Russian threats against Poland, the Czech Republic and Lithuania during the missile defense imbroglio, created the impression among the Union's newest members that their security is not taken seriously in Brussels.

These doubts have reached a fever pitch in the period since the Russian attack on Georgia. Central European leaders were shaken by the European Union's failure to effectively respond to what they see as a bald attempt at resurrecting Russian paramountcy in their neighborhood. Despite backstopping from the British and Scandinavians, they have failed to rally the Union around an Atlanticist position. Western impotence in the face of Russian revisionism—a longstanding strategic nightmare for the region—could reopen old Central European security dilemmas best left shut. The United States should move to shore up regional confidence by reiterating its commitment to NATO's

Article 5 and, if necessary, even shifting some U.S. military assets to Central Europe.

It would be nice if the European Union emerged tomorrow as the unified, staunchly Atlanticist force in world politics that America wants it to become, but that is not going to happen. Even if a unified Europe were to suddenly appear, it would be, like Austria-Hungary before it, strategically sandwiched, geopolitically declining and prone to dependence on whatever power best positioned itself to take advantage of its vulnerability.

The days are over when Washington could characterize its Europe policy as generically pro-integration, punctuated by the occasional coalition of the willing. The United States must devise a long-term strategy for keeping Europe Atlanticist—a strategy that jettisons both bipolarist and unipolarist mindsets, with an emphasis on *ad hoc* groupings and aversion to reciprocity, in favor of a multipolarist acceptance that everything, even the European project, is once again "at play" in the world.

This is not a call for "disaggregation." As Bismarck's interactions with Austria-Hungary show, an external power can shape a multinational great power without strangling the overall integration project. Nor is it a call to fight a new Cold War. Russia is no geopolitical villain. Its policy toward Europe merely represents an astute employment of the most abundant and obvious forms of leverage at its disposal. Russian leaders are simply responding to structural incentives laid open to them by the shift to multipolarity. They may be unappealing to us for reasons of aesthetics, but that does not necessarily make them evil or even particularly dangerous.

Contrary to all that we thought and hoped, history is far from over in Europe. A new game is opening for its strategic heart and soul, and the United States, by failing to nurture its closest relationships inside the European Union, has lost the first round before we even knew the game had begun. Catching up will require us to give up the notions that allies will always be allies or that Europe will always be Atlanticist. Most of all, it will require us to accept the fact that the unipolar moment is definitively over. It's time once again to break out the *Diplomacy* board. ♀