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## ***Can Europe Survive This Moment?***

A new-old ghost is hovering over Europe—war. The most violent continent in the world in terms of the number of deaths caused by warfare during the last 100 years (not to go back any further and include the deaths suffered by Europe during religious wars and the deaths inflicted by Europeans on peoples subjected to colonialism) is heading for a new war.

Almost 80 years after World War II, the most violent conflict so far, which led to the death of between [70 and 85 million people](#), the war on its way may be even more deadly. All previous conflicts started apparently without a strong reason and were supposed to last for a short time. At the beginning of these conflicts, most of the well-to-do population went on with their normal lives—shopping and going to the theater, reading newspapers, taking vacations, and enjoying idly chatting about politics. Whenever a localized violent conflict arose, it was the prevailing belief that it would be resolved locally. For example, very few people (including politicians) thought that the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), which led to the death of [more than 500,000](#) people, would be the harbinger of a wider war—World War II—even though the conditions on the ground pointed to that. While knowing that history does not repeat itself, it is legitimate to ask whether the current war between Russia and Ukraine is not the harbinger of a new, much wider war.

Signs are accumulating that a greater danger may be on the horizon. At the level of public opinion and dominant political discourse, the presence of this danger is surfacing in two opposing symptoms. On the one hand, conservative political forces not only control the ideological initiatives but also enjoy a privileged reception in the media. They are polarizing enemies of complexity and calm argumentation, who use extremely aggressive words and make inflammatory appeals to hatred. These conservative political forces are

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not bothered by the double standards with which they comment on conflicts and death (for example, between the deaths resulting from the conflicts in Ukraine and in Palestine), nor by the hypocrisy of appealing to values that they deny by their practice (they expose the corruption of their opponents to hide their own). In this current of conservative opinion, more and more right-wing and far-right positions are intermingled, and the greatest dynamism (tolerated aggressiveness) comes from the latter. This device aims to inculcate the idea of the need to eliminate the enemy. Elimination by words leads to a predisposition of public opinion toward elimination by deeds. Although in a democracy there are no internal enemies, only adversaries, the logic of war is insidiously transposed to assume the presence of internal enemies, whose voices must first be silenced. In parliaments, conservative forces dominate the political initiative; while leftist forces, disoriented or lost in ideological labyrinths or incomprehensible electoral calculations, revert to a defense as paralyzing as it is incomprehensible. As in the 1930s, the apology for fascism is made in the name of democracy; the apology for war is made in the name of peace.

But this political-ideological atmosphere is signaled by an opposite symptom. The most attentive observers or commentators are aware of the ghost that haunts Europe and have surprisingly converged while expressing their concerns regarding the matter. In recent times, I have identified with analyses by commentators that I have always recognized as belonging to a different political family from my own: conservative, moderate-rightist commentators. What we have in common is the distinction we make between the issues of war and peace and the issues of democracy. We may diverge on the former and converge on the latter. We all agree that only the strengthening of democracy in Europe can lead to the containment of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and, ideally, lead to its peaceful solution. Without vigorous democracy, Europe will continue sleepwalking toward a new war and its own destruction.

Is there time to avoid catastrophe? I would like to say yes, but I cannot. The signs are very worrying. First, the far right is growing globally, driven and financed by the same interested parties who meet in Davos to take care of their business. In the 1930s, they were much more afraid of communism than of fascism, today, without the communist threat, they are afraid of the revolt of the impoverished masses and propose violent police and military repression as the only response. Their parliamentary voice is that of the extreme right. Internal war and external war are the two faces of the same monster, and the arms industry gains equally from both these wars.

Secondly, the Ukraine war seems more confined than what it is in reality. The current scourge, raging on the continent, where 80 years ago so many thousands of innocents (a majority of them Jews) died, looks very much like self-flagellation. Russia up to the Urals is as European as Ukraine, and with this illegal war, in addition to the loss of innocent lives, many of whom will be Russian-speaking individuals, Russia is destroying the infrastructures that it itself built under the former Soviet Union. The history and ethnic-cultural identities between Russia and Ukraine are far more intertwined than with other countries that once occupied Ukraine and now support it. Ukraine and Russia both need to ensure a greater emphasis on their democratic processes to end the war and secure peace. Europe is much larger than the eyes of Brussels can reach. At the European Commission headquarters (or NATO headquarters, which is the same thing), the logic of peace according to the Treaty of Versailles of 1919 dominates, and not the one established under the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The former humiliated the defeated power (Germany) after World War I, and the humiliation led to a new war 20 years later; the latter honored the defeated power (Napoleonic France) and guaranteed a century of peace in Europe. The peace being proposed today is the one of the Treaty of Versailles. It presupposes the total defeat of Russia, just as Adolf Hitler imagined it when he invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Even assuming that this occurs at the level of conventional war, it is easy to predict that if the losing power has nuclear weapons, it will not hesitate to use them. There will be a nuclear holocaust. American neoconservatives already include this eventuality in their calculations, convinced in their blindness that it will all occur thousands of miles from their borders. America first... and last. It is quite possible that they are already thinking about a new Marshall Plan, this time to store the atomic waste accumulated in the ruins of Europe.

Without Russia, Europe is half of itself, economically and culturally. The greatest illusion inculcated in Europeans by the information war over the past year is that Europe, once amputated from Russia, will be able to regain its integrity with the U.S.'s help, which takes very good care of its interests. History shows that a declining empire always tries to drag along its zones of influence to slow down the decline. If only Europe knew how to take care of its own interests.

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