

The World Towards 2020

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It is somewhat challenging to be asked to reflect – over dinner – on what politics is likely to be towards the year 2020. Most of you would be more concerned with the desserts ahead than with the decades ahead.

History moves in unpredictable ways. We are used to dealing with linear change. Small changes, decade after decade, which sometimes build up into something big and significant. Most of history is like that.

But sometimes we are confronted with processes of logarithmic change. It builds up gradually, with nothing much seeming to happen, and then major change occurs suddenly and unexpectedly.

For me, Berlin is associated with the two such radical changes, the consequences of which are dominating the world of today.

I wasn't here that historic November evening fifteen years ago when the infamous wall was penetrated and finally fell.

I came some days later, felt the tremendous human electricity all over town, drove right through Checkpoint Charlie walked into the bookshop on Unter den Linden – where the Reichstag now has a bookstore – and asked for a couple of textbooks in Marxism-Leninism.

The girl was somewhat surprised by the request. Demand was obviously not very high.

But, I said, this is my last chance. Soon the books, the doctrines, the dictatorship and the entire edifice of communist power over half of Europe would be gone.

She smiled, understood and gave me the books.

The wall that stood only meters from here had divided a city, a country and a continent for more than a generation.

But that November night history changed course, and a we were given a new agenda, which has dominated our European political system since then, and in my opinion will continue to do so for some time to come.

A few years later, personal fate took me for some years to another city associated with the drama of European history – to Sarajevo.

Ninety years ago, it was there it all began.

A killing on a day in late June. A July when doctrines of pre-emption reigned supreme in the chancelleries of Europe. By August, nearly all of our part of the world was at war.

In London, the then Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey looked out over Horseguard's Parade, reflected that the lights were going out all over Europe, and doubted whether he would ever see them on again.

He was right. The war led to revolution, inflation, Communism, depression, Fascism, Nazism, war again, genocide, occupation, division – and the wall.

It wasn't really until that November evening here in Berlin that all of Europe finally started to come out of the shadows of Hitler and Stalin and had the possibility of turning on the lights again. We had been through another Dark Age.

We have come a very long way since then.

Today the European Union encompasses more than half a billion people, brings together 25 proud nations, represents the largest integrated economic market in the world, is the global trading power above others, has become the most important market for more than 130 nations all over the world and – by far most important – has built an area of the rule of the law, of representative government and of free societies that is without parallel in European history.

That this is important for us Europeans is obvious. But we should not be shy in highlighting its wider global importance.

During most of the past century, Europe was the source of not only wars that spread all over the globe, but also freedom-hating totalitarian doctrines with global ambitions and global – devastating! – consequences.

If we can now instead provide a model of free nations working together in building a durable peace and democratic structures that transcends old national rivalries it is no small contribution to the building of a better world.

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Three years ago tomorrow I stood with a friend at Potsdamer Platz and reflected on these tremendous changes when I was interrupted by a phone call from a friend at the UN in New York who said that the World Trade Center was in flames.

The world had changed – again.

It's seldom that we see such dramatic changes coming so close to each other.

First, the collapse of an empire. Then the collapse of a world order.

For all of the changes during past centuries, the essence of the international system has remained the same since the Westphalian settlements after the Thirty Years War in 1648.

Its settlement was based on two major pillars.

First – the evolution of technology and finance had by then lead to the situation that it required states to organize and finance the destructive mechanisms necessary in order to threaten other states.

Thus, only functioning states could make war, and thus only functioning states could make peace. The international order was an order of orderly states.

Second – the internal order of any state was a question only for that state or its ruler.

This conclusion come after more than a century of strife in which everyone had intervened everywhere in order to protect those of the same beliefs as yourself.

Let's not forget that the convulsions of Christianity that had stretched over more than a century – from Wittenberg in 1517 to Osnabrueck in 1648 - had come very close to destroying Europe – a third of the inhabitants of its central parts had perished - and now the principle of more or less absolute state sovereignty was proclaimed in order to calm things down.

Although never absolute, these two principles have remained the foundation of the international system ever since. Both the major efforts of the last century to build a truly international order – the League of Nations and the United Nations – were based on them.

But today, they are visibly crumbling. Not everywhere – and not in every respect – but still in a fundamental way.

September 11 demonstrated that the marriage of ancient hatreds and modern technology can lead to small bands of dedicated individuals threatening the fundamental interest of the most powerful of states – technologies of mass destruction are available around us.

On top of this, our global village is increasingly unwilling just to ignore massive violations of human rights, even if these don't threaten more classical national security interests. The intervention in Kosovo, and the non-intervention in Rwanda, has lead to extensive debates on the right – for some even the duty – to intervene in the affairs of others.

For large parts of the world, the principles of the Westphalian settlement thus no longer apply.

We are very clearly in a transition from one international order to another. It will be a long and a difficult process, the outcome of which is by no means certain.

To shape it must be among the paramount tasks of politics in the years ahead.

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There are obvious differences in approach. Most clearly, we have seen that between Europe and the United States. And they must be recognized for what they are.

We must realize that the days of the old alliance is gone. Then, we were united by a common threat. Now, we have failed to develop a common vision.

Today, the dominating agendas of our respective political systems are different.

Our 1989 agenda is about building peace by the sharing of sovereignty on a regional basis. Their 2001 agenda is about seeking security on a global basis by exercising what they consider their sovereign rights.

In terms of popular attitudes, the differences are obvious. Simply speaking – the peoples of Europe feel themselves at peace, while the people of the United States feels itself at war.

These differences are profound. But recognizing them does not mean that the different dominating agendas need to be in contradiction to each other.

I believe that the task of true statesmanship on both sides of the Atlantic during the next few years – and there is room for improvement! - is to demonstrate that they are not. Instead, we must seek new ways in which we can be supportive of each others dominating agenda.

Not believing that we don't differ. Not believing that we can suddenly agree on everything. But based on mutual respect working together to support each other's fundamental objectives.

There is a lot of discussion in Europe today about the nature and consequences of American power, but I don't believe that this is the real issue that will concern us in the decades ahead.

The United States today is spending more money on defence than nearly everyone else combined. It's certainly a superpower – even a hyperpower - in relation to all other states.

But that's of little relief in the world today. You might have dominance or even supremacy in outer space, but if you still can't secure the road from the airport to the Green Zone in Baghdad that is not of much use.

The truth is that while the United States is a superpower in relation to all other powers, it is distinctly not one in relation to the challenges it and the rest of the world faces – be that in Mesopotamia, in Palestine, in Pakistan, in Congo, the Sudan or on the Korean peninsula.

While in the past we were threatened by the strong states and the strong armies, we are now far more endangered by the weak states and the shadowy structures that seek their home in them. And our security in the decades to come – on both sides of the Atlantic – will be determined far less by our ability to destroy strong states than by our ability to repair weak states and, in extreme cases, even build new ones.

State destruction is a relatively straightforward exercise. Some states even do it to themselves. And bombing is an easy business.

But state building – often in complex multi-ethnic areas – requires an abundance of policy, purse and patience – often more than our sometimes too impatient democracies can muster.

I believe that in much the same way as nuclear deterrence was the key function in the old international order, state building in difficult and demanding areas will be the key function in the era we have now entered.

And here - for all the heroic rhetoric - the appetite for unilateralism is likely to be limited in the extreme.

Not even Haiti is small enough for the United States alone to volunteer for this responsibility.

Thus, while some might come towards multilateral efforts by choice, and others by necessity, I'm convinced that we must develop our multilateral instruments for state building and stability operations in the years and the decades ahead.

And it will be done by Europe and the United States in concert with other nations around the world.

Let's for simplicity's sake call it the United Nations.

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For us Europeans, it is natural to pay particular attention to all the challenges coming out of the post-Ottoman area that stretches from Bihac in Bosnia in the northwest to Basra by the Gulf in the southeast. But in a way, this is just part of that large arc of instability – Zbigniew Brzezinski recently referred to it as the Grand Balkans – that stretches from Agadir to Astrakhan and Amritsar.

For more than a generation, we Europeans were threatened by the strength of Soviet power coming out of Russia.

But for the generation to come, our most difficult challenge will be to handle the consequences of the convulsions of the wider Muslim world.

These convulsions have different roots.

The misery and failure of large parts of the Arab world has as much to do with the failure of Arab socialism as it has to do with religion. But the end result is a region where demographic and social strains are building up in such a way as to make explosions as well as implosions more than likely in the years ahead.

But whatever the roots of the problems it is a fact that this is the region at the hearth of the religion of Islam and the culture it represents. What we are witnessing is a great clash within a civilisation.

We see fundamentalists, traditionalists, reformers and secularists each providing their answers to the questions their faith and their peoples are facing.

It's a struggle of scholars, of statesmen, of soldiers and - sometimes - of suicide bombers.

Our task is twofold.

First to prevent this clash within a civilisation to develop into a clash between civilisations.

Then to seek to try help those arguing for open societies and an open world to prevail in this clash.

The importance of this can hardly be exaggerated if we look at the years to come. Were we to fail, the consequences would not only be extremely grave for a region that is our "near abroad", but these consequences would rapidly

spread to the suburbs of our major cities, putting our own societies under severe strain.

We face extremely important issues.

The one way or the other, we must succeed with the twin state-building efforts of Iraq and Palestine. The liberation of Iraq from its past and the liberation of Palestine from its present, thus giving security also to Israel, can never be separated from each other.

This is the Fertile Crescent of the age of Abraham. A decade ahead it will be fertile with either democracy and or with despair – with reform or rage. The stakes for all of us are high.

But the challenge goes beyond this. We must be able to deal with the rivers of rage that are flowing through much of the Muslim world.

Rage against their own corrupt, despotic and incapable regimes, more often than not seen as being supported by the West. Rage against what they feel is the humiliation of their religion and their culture. And certainly rage over the issue of Palestine.

And again – these are issues that stretch right into the hearth of Europe itself. The Muslim world is our neighbour not only when we look at the globe – but increasingly when we look across the street where we live as well.

As I mentioned earlier, I lived for a couple of years in a predominantly Muslim city in Europe. I had a small mosque as my nearest neighbour.

For me, it is self-evident that the Bosnians of Muslim are as European as the Bosnians of Catholic or Orthodox or Jewish faith.

Relations between the faiths have certainly not been harmonious in the past – in Bosnia as well as in Europe at large.

This year, it's 800 years since the shameful Fourth Crusade and its sack of Constantinople. The wounds aren't fully healed yet. It's little more than 500 years since the Turkish Muslim conquest of that same city. It's no more than 400 years ago that Catholics were burning Protestants in Magdeburg, and Protestants were burning Catholics elsewhere.

And it's unfortunately not that long since being Jewish meant risk of sudden death in large parts of Europe.

Today, Catholics and Protestants and Calvinists can work together, Jews are coming back even to Berlin, there is the beginning of a difficult rapprochement between the Eastern and the Western branches of Christianity, and we have to encourage the development of a Muslim faith that sees secular and democratic European states as their natural home.

And Europe is changing by the day.

For more than a century Europe was a place from which tens and tens of millions emigrated. Famine, oppression or war drove the millions away.

But since a couple of decades, it's the other way around. The price of success is attractiveness, and the price of attractiveness is that the poor, the oppressed or those seeking a better life would like to go there.

It has its problems – but it's still better than the alternative.

This dramatically increases our interaction with the Muslim world.

Berlin is partly a Turkish city – one of the largest. In Malmö in Sweden – our third largest town – Ali and Mohammed are the most common names of newborn boys. Amsterdam is rapidly heading towards a Muslim majority. Any given week, there are more people in the mosques than in the churches of the United Kingdom.

It's not going to be the islamisation of Europe. That will never happen. But Islam will be a far more significant part of Europe in the decades to come, adding even more to the pluralism and diversity that is the ultimate source of the creativity and richness of Europe when at it's best.

And ultimately the fusion of our values and those of Islam might well be the force for reform that will change the destinies of large parts of that wider world of Islam beyond the immediate borders of Europe.

It's not about the islamisation of Europe – it's really about the europeanisation of Islam.

Turkey shows that it can be done. Bosnia does the same.

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Politics that have ambitions beyond just populism will have to be truly far-sighted in the years ahead.

Many of us were brought up in the days of the battles over ideology. I wouldn't say that those have lost all of their relevance today – they have not. But overall, we are now living in a world where the politics of identity is becoming more important than the politics of ideology.

This is to a large extent a consequence of the age of globalisation that we are living in. And that globalisation is now very clearly accelerating.

We are just in the beginning of the third major wave of globalisation – the first was prior to 1914, the second was the more restricted one between the late 1940's and the early 1990's, the third is the one we are living in now.

This third wave is far more like the first than the second.

Since the first Chinese reforms in 1978, the fall of the Soviet empire in 1989 and the following years, and the first Indian reforms in 1991, we see up towards two and a half billion people entering our open world and starting to be part of the global production system.

The benefits are huge. We see those that are part of the process surging ahead – and those trying to limit its impact falling behind.

It wasn't many decades ago that Egypt on the one side and South Korea and Taiwan were on roughly the same economic level. But now they are in different worlds. It takes South Korea and Taiwan less than two days to export what Egypt – with approximately the same population – manages in a year.

But we shouldn't underestimate the strains that the process of accelerated change causes in different societies. Capitalism remains a force of creative destruction.

Looking ahead, the big issue on the horizon isn't the power of the United States, but the return of Asia.

I say return, because this was the way it was before the rise of Europe and the Western world.

A millennium ago, more than two thirds of the global economy was in Asia. As late as two centuries ago, it was still half, then sinking down to a fifth half a century ago, and now rapidly approaching a third with the curve for the decades ahead pointing upwards.

There, Westphalia still to a large extent rules. Change is rapid and linear – but logarithmic developments should certainly not be excluded. We know very little about the true pressures building up within the pressure cooker that is China.

It was in 1945 that Karl Popper wrote his book “The Open Society And Its Enemies”. He wrote about the strain of civilisation that is always there as we move from our tribal past to more and more open societies.

In the decades ahead, with the politics of identity becoming even more dominant, we will have to deal with the open world and its enemies, and with the strain of globalisation in our societies as well as across the world.

This is very clearly the challenge in the Muslim world. Tribalism has come back in the form of terrorism. It is the declared enemy of an open world.

But it is no less a challenge in our own societies. Our open societies can only thrive if they are part of an open world. But we still see petty-minded politics as well as raw populism all around us. And we must be alert to the dangers that it represents.

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I remain moderately confident that Europe has perhaps the best possibilities of handling many of these challenges in the decades ahead.

We are not under the illusion that we can do everything ourselves. We know by experience that it's openness towards the rest of the world that is the path forward.

And we are engaged in history's most daring, and the world's most important, evolution towards not only multi-cultural societies, but also a post- and supra-national democratic structures to secure the peace and the prosperity of an entire continent.

These are – no doubt – the principles not only for a decent Europe in the decades ahead, but also for a genuinely better world.