

## Europe as a political force : cards on the table

jeudi 15 avril 2010, par [Pierre-Emmanuel THOMANN](#)

**Citer cet article / To cite this version :**

[Pierre-Emmanuel THOMANN](#), **Europe as a political force : cards on the table**,

*Diploweb.com : la revue géopolitique, 15 avril 2010.*

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**If the European Union wants to be a serious political player in a rapidly changing world, it needs to devise a geopolitical strategy based on where its territorial interests lie. In defining its boundaries, geographical priorities and alliances, the ability to bring its weight to bear in the world order will be greatly enhanced.**

**As part of its strategy of geopolitical synergy, *diploweb.com* is pleased to present this article, which first appeared in *Revue Défense Nationale*, April 2010, pp. 13-20.**

THE CURRENT state of the world is characterized by the geographical dispersion of the sources of power. These are predominantly states but also smaller (separatist regions or territories) and larger ones (alliances or international organizations). This results in the fragmentation and recombination of the political geography. Ownership of territory is necessary for political entities to provide military and economic security, political power or to confirm their identity. The definition of zones of influence and the positions of new frontiers change as a function of adjustments between the geopolitical ambitions of the various actors, oscillating between rivalry and cooperation.

In the twenty-first century, in order to navigate in a world in a state of flux, a geopolitical strategy is required, conceived as a spatiotemporal whole and functioning as a means of reducing others' power. This is because the mastery of territory and time in the service of a political objective is a decisive advantage and a central element of sovereignty. This mastery depends on a capacity for appreciation of others' space and time constraints.

Is it enough for the European Union (EU) to adopt a position as an 'empire of standards', in anticipation of the growing weight of the legal factor in international relations, in the face of the geopolitical doctrines of other political entities such as the United States, Russia, China and India, which are based on traditional power ?

Questions of territory, geographical priorities and frontiers do not feature prominently in European negotiations, as they are sensitive and generate conflict. Various obstacles to a European geopolitical approach persist :

- . territorial blindness resulting from the almost overwhelming importance accorded to the legal, economic and political aspects of analyses, which makes it difficult to consider questions of territory and sovereignty ;
- . an asymmetric perception of threats to and interests of the member states as a function of their geographic position and history ;
- . a world-view inherited from the Cold War, and a lack of thought and public debate at the politico-strategic level.

In order to count on the international scene the EU must reposition itself with respect to the outside world.

A better appreciation of geopolitical issues would be doubly useful for the EU in its analysis and comprehension of the territorial issues which concern it in the twenty-first century and for the development of a power strategy based on the control of territory and subordinated to the

objective of a 'political Europe'. It would enable the EU to get involved in the world balance and to take its place with the status of an autonomous geopolitical actor.

## **A geopolitical strategy for the EU**

The control of territory as a central pillar of its strategy would make the most of the EU's advantages in a world characterized by the increasing number of contributing elements of power, i.e. defence but also the economy, finance, energy, culture, demography, information etc. A geopolitical strategy enables these different elements of power to be coordinated according to a spatiotemporal strategy. That implies the designation of geographic and functional priorities on different levels.

### **The principles of a geopolitical strategy**

It is not so much the importance accorded to negotiation, as opposed to military power, which prevents the EU from playing a political role at its appropriate level but the absence of a strategy that transforms its various assets into elements of power. The EU will find it difficult to define and defend its own interests if it does not support a posture based on its values with a strategy designed to balance the geopolitical strategies of other actors.

'Political Europe' must remain the EU's aim. The definition used here is an alliance of European states, seeking to acquire autonomy of thought, decision and action at international level in order to ensure their security, defend their strategic and vital interests, and promote conditions for the flourishing of their common civilization. It does not, therefore, tend towards the 'fusion' of the member states and remains a collective instrument of political sovereignty.

The control of territory remains a key element of power. An increase in the EU's territory changes its power potential. It is necessary to identify the strengths and weaknesses which the pursuit of enlargement brings to its political purpose. An alternative to enlargement is the negotiation of alliances. An ally's territory represents a power asset as a function of its size, its qualities and its geographical position. An alliance strategy would offer the EU a political alternative to the division of power among member states.

The 'rehabilitation of the frontier' is a condition for strengthening the EU's identity in the eyes of external entities, the identification of its foreign policy interests and the support of European citizens.

A 'grand strategy' implies an ordering of priorities by geographical regions on different scales : worldwide, Eurasia and Africa, Europe, and the regional and local level.

## **The EU and the world chessboard**

The transformation of the EU into an autonomous geopolitical actor involves its insertion into the system of world balances. It must have a vision, clearly identifiable by other geopolitical centres, corresponding to its geographical extent. A geopolitical strategy must follow on from the EU's geographical characteristics.

The EU's territory extends over part of the western peninsula of the Eurasian continent with some extra-European possessions. In terms of surface area, it comes seventh in the world rankings. With nearly 500 million inhabitants, it occupies third place in terms of population, behind China and India. The EU and its member states also include the largest sea area in the world thanks to its exclusive economic zones surrounding regions outside its periphery and overseas territories in the Atlantic, Pacific, Arctic and Indian Oceans. The trade in energy resources, the prospect of their exhaustion and increasing maritime trade all underline the importance of the control of energy flows and trade routes. The sea, as the last free space on the planet and richly endowed with resources, is subject to a recrudescence of territorial claims. The combination of maritime and continental power will guarantee the EU's security and the prosperity of its civilization on the Eurasian continental landmass, in the Euro-Mediterranean and Euro-African areas and, at sea, will constitute a vector of future expansion for Europe.

### **Participation in the club of world powers**

The EU must not be excluded from the group of alliances which have formed through competitive accommodation. A policy of alliances undertaken as a function of one's security, economic, energy, environmental, demographic and cultural interests is a way of diversifying one's external relations to include every continent.

Taking part in a future 'club' of world powers presumes the construction of alliances intended to avoid the supremacy of a single centre over all the others, and the negotiation of common positions. The object is to promote world equilibrium by means of weight and counterweight, enabling the accommodation of rival ambitions.

The West should not be an obstacle to a political Europe. The EU must identify its own interests separate from Euro-Atlantic or US interests.

### **EU defence**

The EU is not a military alliance, unlike the Atlantic Alliance. European Security and Defence Policy is limited to crisis management missions. This situation constitutes an obstacle to its sovereignty. A mutual defence agreement between the EU member states, organized within a 'Central Alliance' and with a geopolitical ambition, could help the EU along the road to a political Europe.

### **The geopolitics of trade flows**

As an indispensable node of worldwide energy, commercial, financial and demographic networks, the EU could take over, develop and direct the trade flows necessary for its energy security and its economic expansion. The active consolidation of its position as a major crossroads for world trade is slowing down the gradual loss of its central position in the world in favour of Asia. The reaffirmation of its European economic model would avoid the steady slide towards a transatlantic market absorbing the unique European market into a centre-peripheral relationship with the United States.

To manage the geopolitics of physical trade flows a 'spider's web' strategy is required. This is a web in which the breaking of one or more strands does not prejudice the stability of the whole

; a sufficiently dense and diversified European energy and commercial trade network could cope with the possible loss of an energy transit route or a trade route. The spread of energy and commercial trade routes on a global scale allows new opportunities to be grasped in terms of energy alliances and commercial possibilities, and would make it possible to adapt to the shift of resource-rich areas.

A permanent flexible military, naval air and air projection force would have the task of re-establishing movement on energy and commercial trade routes during an interstate conflict, a terrorist act or an act of piracy.

In the setting of a policy of diversification and security for energy and commercial trade routes, the opening of a Eurasian and an Arctic route would offer an alternative to the Cape and Suez Canal routes. The transit routes coming from Russia need to be reinforced at the same time. The links with Siberia, Central Asia and the Far East would be improved by these two new corridors. The system would consist of a network of continental and maritime lines crossing the heart of the Eurasian continent and two sea routes around the Eurasian continent by the South (the Cape and Suez) and by the North (the North-West Passage and the North) through the Arctic Ocean.

Geopolitics also exists in terms of financial and information flows. The great world centres concentrate political, economic and financial power and constitute the motors of these flows. The financial and information networks therefore tend to become a subsystem of the range of geopolitical forces by means of a power strategy between states, economic and financial circles and information organs. A geopolitics of financial and information flows could be linked to a European geopolitical strategy.

### **Eurasia and Africa : issues for the EU's security and identity**

The EU, wedged between the Asian landmass and the African continent, must operate on a Eurasian scale as its first priority, within the Euro-Mediterranean and Euro-African space. A policy of alliances and the creation of buffer zones and areas of influence will constitute levers to reach a critical threshold of power.

The purpose of the EU is to position itself as an indispensable player in the equilibrium of the Eurasian continent and hence on a world scale. The Mediterranean is, by virtue of its geography, a vital issue for Europe's security on its southern flank. The Euro-Mediterranean area is a reservoir of economic, energy and demographic alliances. Africa is an issue for the EU's increasing weight as a contributor to world security in the context of stabilization missions. The historical links between some European states and African countries, the immigration question, Africa's economic potential and its natural resources are also major considerations.

The Eurasian, Euro-Mediterranean and African zones represent the EU's eastern and southern economic and energy hinterland. By exercising a stabilizing influence in these regions through an alliance strategy, the EU would achieve the level of power necessary to take its place alongside the United States, Russia, China, India and Japan.

The EU can progressively make its Eurasian and African geographic hinterland the linchpin of its responsibility for security and development in the context of the world balance. The objective for the EU is to prevent any exclusive supremacy in these regions or the rise of alliances directed against its interests, limiting them or embroiling them in external adventures.

Territories on other continents also possess strategic value. To cite only South America, French Guyana is vital for independent European access to space thanks to its space base.

### **The EU's enlargement and identity**

Enlargement is the result of a 'domino effect' : it is a means for peripheral member states to achieve a more central position. With the admission of Turkey, the EU would become a 'mini-Eurasia' and the question of admitting the southern Caucasian states would arise. With enlargement to Ukraine, the EU would find itself facing the identity question between Russia and Ukraine. The pursuit of enlargement is today causing the EU to import the geopolitical fault-lines resulting from the historical frontiers which mark the Eurasian continent. This weakens the EU's coherence and identity and increases the risks of dilution.

### **A future scenario of a political Europe**

Leaving aside the Balkans, the negotiation of political alternatives to the prospect of enlargement provides the occasion for the EU to fix its frontiers in order to preserve its cohesion, strengthen its identity and facilitate the identification of its interests.

Membership of the Atlantic Alliance has hitherto filled the role of 'anteroom' to the EU. The freezing of the Atlantic Alliance's enlargement to Ukraine also enables the EU's own project there to be halted. It is in the Union's interest to reduce Russia's perception of encirclement.

As for Turkey, prudence requires us not to plunge the EU precipitately into a Eurasian risk area including the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Access to the energy resources of the Middle East and Central Asia through the Eurasian corridor (Black Sea/Turkey - Southern Caucasus - Central Asia) demands a firm alliance with Turkey, which can fill the role of pivotal state more easily outside the EU.

A deepening of relations with Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia can only last if Russia's interests in the European puzzle are taken into account. Relations between Ukraine and the EU could be oriented in the direction of a 'bridge' rather than a 'front' against Russia.

Russia firmly intends to remain a powerful geopolitical pole. It holds one of the keys to security on the European continent and will remain a major energy supplier to the EU whatever form diversification may take. An energy, industrial and political alliance with Russia is in the interest of the EU in extending its hinterland towards 'Euro-Siberia'.

The negotiation of a new Eurasian security architecture preserving Russia's security interests would facilitate the stabilization of the EU's continental hinterland. It would also be a favourable opportunity for the EU to make itself a centre of equilibrium alongside Russia which would constitute a useful counter-weight against other global powers. It would also offer a

chance to rebalance the Atlantic Alliance so as to emphasize European interests better.

### **The European dimension : towards a common view**

Each European state has its own vision and its own geopolitical perceptions which stem from its history and geography. How can these different views, based on different priorities, be harmonized ? The various transatlantic, Mediterranean and African orientations are the source of centrifugal forces between member states. The identification of common interests within the various geographic regions enables potential synergies between different national plans to be highlighted and rival visions to be accommodated.

A European geopolitical strategy is not intended to replace national strategies but to improve their effectiveness. This implies reciprocal interaction to promote a gradual Europeanization of national strategies and an awareness of national interests in the European strategy. There is of course no question of combining national plans.

The constitution of a 'Central European Alliance' ought to be decisive in organizing a critical mass in Europe and avoiding reciprocal neutralization. This would entail at least the membership of Germany and France, whose territories constitute the central axis of the European peninsula. France guards its autonomy carefully and has a strong strategic tradition. It could assume a leadership role with Germany to forge a continental European axis.

### **Conclusion**

It is necessary to launch the geopolitical debate with the citizens of the EU so that it is not confined to the political, diplomatic and military level but could serve as an incentive to advance 'political Europe'. This would avoid opposing geopolitical questions and public opinion. Filling the geopolitical void would help to remedy the democratic deficit by giving a sense of direction to the construction of Europe.

The transformation of the EU into a geopolitical actor requires a new impetus provided by an internal alliance. This approach involves a deepened Franco-German accord also bringing in those member states sharing the same ambition. Chancellor Adenauer and General de Gaulle opened the way with the Franco-German Elysée Treaty in 1963. It also requires the political courage to address the most sensitive questions such as sovereignty and the European identity, power, territorial priorities, frontiers and—why not ?—the emergence of European patriotism.

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