
Europe in Crisis? No! Europe Braving Crisis.

Presently, European countries face an accumulation of crises – the greatest challenges for European social stability and security in modern history. COVID-19 pandemic, illegal migration, energy crisis, disinformation campaigns, cyber-attacks and other means of hybrid influence became an everyday reality of Europeans. However, the biggest shock of 21st century Europe became the interstate high intensity conventional conflict when Russia attacked Ukraine. A part of the current security concerns is subversive activity exploiting the freedom of speech and other attributes of liberal democracies. Certain population groups are becoming more outspoken in their extreme attitudes, which has been unheard of for decades in Europe.

Annotation

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The accumulation of crises affecting people`s living standards can possibly create a situation in which a change in values may occur and this may pose a threat to already accepted moral imperatives. The primary responsibility of governments and state institutions must be preparing institutional systems in order to adequately react to various threats. The system`s reactions must be flexible, and it is therefore necessary to have a robust material base. Social resilience, founded on the readiness of all decisive elements of state system, is vital when facing modern crises.

Introduction

Europe is a continent which undoubtedly belongs to one of the most advanced parts of the Earth. Be it industry, science and research, social, or environmental areas, Europe always strived to be an example worth following. In recent years, the high living standard of European citizens greatly increased the demand to meet people's needs. Satisfying these needs caused higher dependency on products imported from abroad, most notably East and South-East Asia. This situation is a typical example of globalization in politics, economy and industry. Note, for decades, Europe functioned without major issues and exactly as was expected of a global world – where production capacity is intertwined with supply chains and business locations all over the world.

This, however, is true only in ideal circumstances, when all the individual elements can do business without any restrictions or protectionist interference, which are the products of national interests. Partial interests are still one of the challenges of international political negotiations – in certain circumstances, this can be changed. A decisive shift occurs when the global trends are disrupted by a situation that is not small-scale enough to be local, not in competitions of one government, and that has an enormous influence over people's lives and calls for hard decisions. Such a situation certainly was COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic was not an occurrence which would change the basis of the world as people know it. Its presence is not able to unrecognizably transform international system. To a certain degree, it could even be a challenge. Some important trends and processes, which have not manifested yet in their full dynamic had a chance to show their potential. Concurrently, the pandemic brings about economic collapse, causing uncertainty and pessimism into the set relations in politics and economy, and especially into people's everyday lives. (Dostál, Havlíček, and Janebová 2020).

Europe, namely the EU member states, became a victim not only to the pandemic that affected the whole world without mercy, but also came face to face with different crises which might not appear in different places on Earth, or in case they do, it is in different circumstances – not accumulating as in Europe. Therefore, it can be said Europe is facing the greatest accumulation of crises in modern

history.

Aside from COVID-19 pandemic, the most notable crises are illegal migration and energy crisis. A completely new phenomenon in Europe is the interstate war between Russia and Ukraine which began this year on 24 February with Russian military aggression towards Ukraine. To prevent the collapse of the second largest European country, many other European countries support Ukraine in international politics, and most notably by supplying weapons and other military equipment, sharing intelligence, accepting Ukrainian refugees and providing direct financial support to the Ukrainian economy and social system.

The aforementioned crises are further amplified by the hybrid warfare against European countries. An essential part of it are cyber-attacks on critical and civilian infrastructure and spreading disinformation. The disruption of business and supply chains is caused not only by the difficulties associated with the restrictions due to COVID-19, but also by direct destructive attacks on the components of technological units supplying the necessary energy raw materials.

Foresight vs Readiness

More than half of independent European states are part of two different organizations. The first of them is the European Union, a political and economic union. As a matter of fact, this is an entity identified as sui generis, partially possessing authority of an international organization and of a unified state. As of 1 January 2022, EU comprised of 27 European states with 447,5 million citizens in total. This represents circa 5,7% of world population. (“EU Population on 1 January” 2022)

The second organization is the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO), a Euro-Atlantic military alliance of 30 countries, with U.S. and Canada as the non-European element. The citizens of the Alliance make up to 951,5 million. (“What is NATO?”) The raison d'être of the organization is the defence of its own members against military threats.

As a part of the planning process, both the independent states and the two organizations grouping European states together predicted all the crises the world is facing to-day in their strategic

documents, including also preparation of institutions in times of crisis. Some of the situations mentioned in the documents included uncontrollable illegal migration, a shortage of non-renewable energy resources and also a pandemic of the same scale as the world has recently experienced with COVID-19. Next, climatic changes and local wars outside European continent were predicted. Lastly, the risks connected to excessive dependence on production capacities and functioning supply chains located abroad were highlighted.

All of the aforementioned was predicted as more or less likely, more or less real. The exact manifestation, places and time were not known. The extent and degree of involvement of the parties were also unknown. Nevertheless, the threats to modern society were described precisely. Therefore, it cannot be said the governments were not aware of them and that they are foreign concepts. These threats cannot be averted, but people can be prepared for them.

The only exception in these strategic documents was a high intensity conventional conflict in European space. A conflict between two advanced states with modern armies armed with modern technologies and weapon systems. This conflict is not a guerrilla war led somewhere in a jungle or remote mountain ranges. It is a war with tens of thousands of victims, not only between the soldiers of the opposing forces, but especially among Ukrainian civilians. A war bringing ruin to the latest successes civilization has had, destroying critical infrastructure, homes, schools and hospitals was not expected in 21st century Europe. In present times, no one could imagine such a barbaric war on European soil. Not even those assessing the security environment and outlining potential future threats which the world needs to be prepared for.

From a military standpoint, the armies of NATO and EU member states were preparing for armed conflicts stemming from interethnic wars and international terrorism. Although several signs indicated some states are prone to an aggressive policy whilst promoting revisionist plans in the international environment, the nature of the current conflict in Ukraine still came as a shock. Nevertheless, armed forces and their commandants are able to react swiftly and adapt the military training, including strategy, according to the current situation. One of the great benefits of the changes is the unity of political leaders and subsequent support. Such unity is a decisive factor for the armed forces – not only on moral grounds and values, but also in the acquisition of modern weapon systems. The military

is flexible.

On the other hand, the unreadiness for threats of other state structures and institutions is more alarming. Although the threats were predicted, they appeared so distant there was no immediate reason for an instant response. However, as the approach to COVID-19 pandemic has shown, individual states found their own way to combat the spread of the illness. Not all of the methods are successful and none of them are perfect. Most importantly, they are functional. Retrospective analysis found that the crucial obstacle was the unreadiness of state structure for a pandemic of such extent. Until recent years, humanity did not have to combat that kind of pandemic in modern history. The main problem arises from the preparation of state infrastructure for such threat at national level, which does not consider the contemporary reality of globalization.

For individual states, the issue is not the appearance of separated crises, but the accumulation of them at the same time in the same place. This includes their global character and context. Exactly this can be seen in Europe to-day. On one hand, Europe has a great potential which can help resolve the crises. On the other hand, the fact that the predicted threats became a reality came as a shock and caused certain paralysis within.

Illegal Migration

The European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion stated the following in November 2015:

“Europe has witnessed an inflow of a large number of people over the last years. As a consequence of the geopolitical instability in the Middle East and Africa, migration and refugee flows towards Europe have increased with significant territorial impacts on European countries, regions and cities. This situation has resulted in the largest movement of people to European countries since the Second World War. It brings challenges for regions and cities but also territorial development opportunities. Indeed, the recent events related to the Syrian civil war and the subsequent influx of refugees towards Europe have increased the need to define effective measures in Europe, its regions and cities need new approaches in managing this unprecedented migration crisis. Many efforts are already in place in welcoming and managing the many migrants and refugees. Moreover, while a

European response is currently being debated it is important to learn and be aware of the territorial and urban aspects of the current refugee inflow to Europe.” (“Territorial and urban aspects of migration and refugee inflow” 2015).

A fundamental change in the approach to illegal migration to Europe occurs in 2015 following the presentation of positive attitude towards refugees by Germany, despite the immigrants entering European space by illegal means. Two contributing factors of the problem with refugees are smuggling gangs, which gain billions of U.S. dollars due to illegal migration, and the numerous non-profit humanitarian organizations invested in the issue. These non-profit organizations base the legitimacy of their own activities in favour of refugees exclusively on the moral imperatives of humanitarian Europe while turning a blind eye to the real reasons for the arrival of refugees, who are mostly economic migrants. In continuation of these issues contributing to the problem, Europe became the target destination of illegal economic migrants, who undertake the journey with the hopes of finding better life in western civilization.

From the critical year 2015 until 2020, the illegal refugees took the routes through central Mediterranean via Libya, where networks of smuggles and traffickers originate, and through eastern Mediterranean from Turkey, a safe country. Another route leads through western Mediterranean to Spain via Morocco and Algeria. This route to Europe was the most frequently used one in 2018. In connection to the rise of illegal migration, Morocco’s increased efforts, along with Spain and EU, to combat this problem proved successful as in the years following 2018, the number of illegal migrations declined. The restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic had also contributed to the decline of illegal migrations. (“Migration flows in the Central Mediterranean route: The EU and its member states have taken a number of measures to address the migration situation in the Central Mediterranean route”)

The routes from western Africa lead through Canary Islands, and the transit countries consist of Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, Senegal and Gambia. Since 2006, over 31 000 illegal migrants underwent this route and in the following years the migration declined. In 2020, however, a sharp increase was recorded. The reasons for this sudden change were the COVID-19 restrictions laid upon countries in Africa preventing the usage of more traditional routes, the aforementioned effort

of Morocco, and the deterioration of social and economic conditions. ("Migration flows in the Western routes: The EU and its member states have taken a number of measures to address the migration situation in the Western Mediterranean and Western African routes" 2018).

Another increase in illegal migration became apparent in 2022 with migrants using both Mediterranean and Balkan routes. The Balkan route is mainly used by refugees from Syria, including more distant countries from Middle East. The starting point for entering the Balkan route is therefore Turkey. The refugees who undergo this route are mostly headed to Germany and partly to Austria.

Illegal migration is not a typical European phenomenon. With the exception of former European colonial powers, since 2015, this became a new situation for Europe as the countries had minimum experience with such issues. Apart from the enormous burden on social system of the transit and destination European countries, the biggest problem is the low level of integration into the societies of the destination countries. It is believed that *"the integration of foreigners is a fundamental tool of successful migration politics. It is a reciprocal process including the foreigners and the majority of citizens. Integration is a complex topic which affects many aspects of society."* ("Integrace cizinc?." 2016)

Cyber Attacks

By the example of the Czech Republic from its the current position as the presiding country of the Council of the European Union, this modern civilizational threat is demonstrated. It is a medium-sized European country with approximately 10 million inhabitants, a member state of NATO and the European Union, a country with a predominantly industrial economy.

In 2021, the Czech National Cyber and Information Security Agency (NÚKIB) received a report of 476 cyber security incidents, and followed up with 157 of them. In the previous year of 2020, there were 468 incidents, 99 of those were dealt with. As can be noticed from the numbers, there was an interannual increase in cyber security incidents. Not only does NÚKIB confirm this, but also National Security Team (CSIRT.CZ) which dealt with 1726 incidents in 2021, contrasting the 1267 incidents in 2020. The most frequent cyber-attacks are phishing (fraudulent emails) and port scanning attacks.

The common targets of the attacks are found in state administration organizations, transport, healthcare and banking. (“Zveřejnili jsme Zprávu o stavu kybernetické bezpečnosti za rok 2021.” 2022)

In the European context, it is intriguing to observe cyber-attacks related to COVID-19 pandemic. In November and December 2020, there was a world-wide 45% increase of cyber-attacks at healthcare organizations. To compare, other organizations experienced “only” 22% increase.

More than 100 000 malicious websites and 10 000 malicious files attempt to steal user data or cause damages in the entire Europe. On average, every 10 seconds an organization becomes a victim of ransomware. 87 % of organizations experienced an exploitation attempt of a known vulnerability. In 46% of organizations, at least one employee downloaded a malicious mobile application. (“Rok 2020 přinesl kromě koronavirové pandemie i pandemii kybernetickou a nárůst útoků na nemocnice.” 2021)

In the context of Russian-Ukrainian conflict, cyber warfare is a standard part of this armed conflict. Russia attacks Ukrainian infrastructure – power grids, internet, banks, and also systems related to government administration and military. Prior to the war in Ukraine, the Russian cyber-attacks were considered field testing. In response to these attacks in cyber space, Ukrainians created a volunteer “IT army”, which aims at Russian targets since the conflict started. This led to data leakage and disruption of services in Russia. (“The biggest cyber attacks of 2022.” 2022)

Energy Crisis

Put into simple terms, the reason for current energy crisis is the war in Ukraine and mutual economic sanctions between Europe and Russia, which were a response to the Russian invasion of Ukrainian soil. The reduction of gas supply from Russia to Europe directly affects the wholesale price of electricity in EU. The consumer electricity prices in EU rose by 35% compared to last year. The European governments were forced to make countermeasures, one of them being the regulation on intervention in this emergency situation with the aim to combat electricity prices and so to help citizens and businesses most affected by the energy crisis. The desired effect is to have a secure continuous supply of electricity and gas in EU. (“Infographic - Energy crisis: Three EU-coordinated

measures to cut down bills.” 2022).

Great attention was brought to the damages caused to Nord Stream, a system of underwater gas pipelines from Russia to Germany on the seabed of Baltic Sea. Nord Stream 1 is in order since 2011 and Nord Stream was supposed to operate in 2022. Nord Stream 1 is the longest underwater gas pipeline on Earth, stretching 1224km through territories of Russia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany. Each pipeline is able to carry 27,5 trillion cubic meters of gas every year.

The main advantage of Nord Stream presented to the public, especially by the German government, was how energetically secure the pipelines were, which is quite ironic to-day. Ukraine, Poland, and Baltic states opposed the construction of the pipelines from the beginning.

A distinct pressure drop occurred on 26 September 2022, caused by a gas leak in both strings of the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline. Later, three more gas leaks were confirmed near Danish and Swedish coasts. Nord Stream 2 also suffered damage on one of its strings as a consequence of the gas leaks of Nord Stream 1. (Vakulenko 2022).

The damages of Nord Stream sparked speculations of deliberate attack on the pipeline. The countries in West accuse Russia as the assailant, finding the motivation in destabilizing the region and to send a message of the vulnerability of the alternative European infrastructure. If this accusation is considered, it means further escalation of the Ukrainian conflict and continuation of hybrid warfare. In the attempt to destabilize European economic situation and causing the concern of citizens about the current events, the typical perspective transforms into worry: “how do we endure winter?”

In connection to this, Russia might be attempting to present itself as a victim – Russia is under attack – to justify the war in Ukraine. Another motive could be the attempt to evade the payment of fines for not fulfilling the contractual conditions for gas supply in Europe.

From military standpoint it can be stated that Putin commands the world’s biggest spy submarine fleet. One of them includes Belgorod, a submarine specially designed for attacks on underwater cables and with an easy access to Baltic Sea via Kaliningrad and St. Petersburg. Incidentally, a newly developed fleet of submarine drones has a base there as well. (“Nord Stream attack: European

infrastructure now at risk, experts warn” 2022) Others accuse the U.S. as the aggressor who damaged Nord Stream. Not only Russia belongs to them, but also Poland. In connection to this, the Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski posted on Twitter: “Thank you, USA”. Poland opposed the construction of Nord Stream 2 and diversified gas supply earlier than other states. Russia mentioned that the damages to Nord Stream benefit the U.S. LNG suppliers due to the lack of Russian competition. The reason for this is the increase of profits and a statement of the President Joe Biden from February 2020, who promised, in case Russia attacks Ukraine: “there will no longer be a Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it.” The *destruction* of the pipelines so they could not be brought to order would mean a decrease of Russian influence over European energy market. To some, Ukraine is a possible aggressor, who aims to strike a blow to Russia despite it alienating the land from EU. (Pike 2022).

Conclusion

Each of the threats is dangerous and very difficult to manage by itself. Nowadays in Europe, the accumulation of these threats can be observed, as well as the subsequent crisis which Europe must deal with.

The most serious hybrid action against European society is of a subversive nature. The targeted action of the disinformation campaigns aimed at escalating public sentiment bring tension to some social segments and contribute to their radicalization. The narrative of the threat to social security is the content of disinformation that is working. The threat of social instability, however, is only one of the key topics and perhaps the least significant in terms of danger in the whole scope.

Freedom of speech and other attributes of liberal democracies are abused when influencing public opinion in European societies through subversive activities. Some groups of the population are already becoming more active in their extreme attitudes. This has not been seen in Europe for decades. Militant expressions of such attitudes are still almost insignificant, both in quantity and form. With the deepening crisis, however, social instability cannot be ruled out even in countries with deep democratic tradition.

As such, it is appropriate to analyse current Europe in more distant regions as well. The accumulation of crises affecting the way of life of society can create a situation in which the value system and may change and which may pose a threat to the already accepted moral imperatives. Therefore, the primary responsibility of governments and state institutions is not only to prepare an adequate institutional system that will allow responding to various threats. It is necessary for this system to be flexible when reacting and, above all, to be able to rely on a sufficiently robust material base.

The most important element in managing the situation is the resilience of the society, of the citizens themselves. People's natural fears stemming from uncertainty must be confronted with government actions which are transparent, swift enough and adequate to the size of the threat and its risk to internal stability of society. Social resilience based on the readiness of all decisive elements of the state system is the basic prerequisite for managing any crises that individual countries or whole regions might face. As shown on a global scale by COVID-19 pandemic, the disruption of supply chains, energy crisis, or conventional conflict in 21st century Europe, nothing is impossible and often many of those situations are hard to picture in all contexts.

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Libor Kutej Colonel, Associate Professor, Ph.D., Director of the Institute of Intelligence Studies, Vice-Rector for External Relations and Internationalisation, University of Defence, Brno, Czech Republic.