

FUTURE *takes*

Transcultural Futurist Magazine

ISSN 1554-7744

Vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2008)

Second Transcultural Thematic Issue

“Transcultural Impacts and Perspectives on the Future”

Perspectives from Canada, Italy, South Africa, Southeast Asia, Southwest Asia (Middle East), the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

Futurist Book Group Discussion – a Double-Header!

Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century

by Mark Leonard

PublicAffairs, 2006

192 pages

ISBN-10: 1586484249

ISBN-13: 978-1586484248

and

The Last Days of Europe

by Walter Laqueur

Thomas Dunne Books, 2007 (first edition)

256 pages

ISBN-10: 0312368704

ISBN-13: 978-0312368708

*Synopsis of the November 2007 meeting of the Futurist Book Group (Washington DC Chapter);
summarized and reviewed by Ken Harris*

For the first time in its four-year history, the Futurist Book Group of the Washington Chapter of the World Future Society discussed two books in the same meeting – *Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century* by Mark Leonard and *The Last Days of Europe* by Walter Laqueur. As the titles imply, this

departure from past practice was entirely appropriate, as the former book is extraordinarily optimistic and the latter is quite pessimistic about Europe's future.

LEONARD – THE CASE FOR OPTIMISM

What is Leonard's case for a bright European future? One of Leonard's strongest arguments for a bright European future is the way the European Union is organized and operates. Previous attempts to unify Europe, like Napoleon's and Hitler's, he argues, failed because they attempted to do so under a single organizing principle. By contrast, the European Union, which has gradually evolved from the far humbler European Coal and Steel Community of six nations to its current membership of 27 nations with many common institutions, has no central organizing principle. Just as its founder Jean Monnet envisioned, each member country joins and adheres to EU principles because doing so is in its own interest. In this way, the common interest of all members advances. Although the European Union has many features of a federal government including a parliament, a court, a common currency for 13 members, and 80,000 pages of regulations, Leonard argues that it is not a federal government like that of the United States. Instead national governments act as agents of the European Union to see that agreed on laws and regulations are implemented within their countries. Moreover, each member state exercises surveillance over every other member to assure compliance. As new members join, they must adopt European Union norms, and from that time forward they have a say in the development of future norms. The only theoretical limits to expansion and further integration are the number of countries that will accept the norms existing when they join and what the member countries agree to do jointly.

Leonard's second powerful argument is that non-member nations recognize the benefits of membership and are therefore eager to join or at least follow Europe's lead in many matters. Access to the European market of over 450 million citizens is such a powerful incentive that Europe's sphere of influence now extends to 80 nations in the Western Balkans, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Middle East, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. He calls this the Eurosphere. Moreover, he correctly points out that even large US multi-national corporations feel bound by European laws and regulations if they are to do business in Europe. For example, European regulation undid the proposed General Electric-Honeywell merger.

The third major point in Leonard's case is that the European way of conducting international affairs is much more in tune with the 21st century than America's. America, argues Leonard, relies exclusively and excessively on military power to accomplish its international objectives whereas Europe sees the use of military power as only one of many tools. This passage nicely sums up his view:

“The contrast between the two doctrines is stark. The Bush doctrine attempts to justify action to remove a threat before it has a chance of being employed against the United States. It is consequently focused very closely on physical assets and capabilities, necessarily swift in execution and therefore short-term in conception and unavoidably military in kind. The European doctrine of pre-emption, in contrast, is predicated on long-term involvement, with the military just one strand of activity, along with pre-emptive economic and legal intervention, and is aimed at building the political and institutional bases of stability, rather than simply removing the immediate source of threat.”

In the long run, Leonard foresees a world made up of “regional clubs.” He sees this world emerging today, not only because the European Union has been expanding and may continue to do so, but also because of the emergence of other regional groupings like Mercosur, the Arab League, and NAFTA. These regional groupings will each promote global development, regional security and open markets for their members. He concludes the book with this sentence, “As this process [of regionalization] continues,

we will see the emergence of a New European Century, not because Europe will run the world as an empire, but because the European way of doing things will have become the world's.”

LAQUEUR – THE CASE FOR PESSIMISM

What is Laqueur's case for a Europe in decline? Laqueur bases his pessimistic argument chiefly on two key aspects of contemporary European demographics. The first is that Europe is in long-term population decline. The total fertility rate for Europe, he notes, is 1.37, which is well below the replacement level of approximately 2.0 births per woman. The United Kingdom's population will decline from about 60 million today to 43 million in 2100, and France's from about 60 million to 43 million. Most other European countries, particularly Russia, will experience even steeper population declines, as Laqueur points out. By 2050, he contends, only Cyprus, Malta, and possibly Sweden will still be growing in population. The implication of this, of course, is that the population of Europe will be increasingly older and less vigorous and the burden of caring for older people will steadily mount. Also the ethnic makeup of Europe will be sharply altered as the number of people of European ethnicity declines even more sharply than the total European population.

The second important European demographic trend is immigration from Muslim countries. Immigration would not be a bad thing if it were in relatively small numbers and the immigrants assimilated as in the past. However, this is not the case. Muslims now comprise significant proportions of the populations of most European countries, and they have not assimilated well. Millions of guest workers from the poorest and least educated regions of Turkey have come to Germany, but they have formed Turkish communities within Germany and apparently have little desire to assimilate despite efforts of social service programs to help them do so. A key obstacle to their assimilation is that they came to Germany knowing little or no German. Large numbers of Muslims also came to France and Spain from North Africa and to Britain from its former colonies in South Asia. The immigrants to France and Britain, however, at least knew some French or English. Disaffection of these Muslim populations is pronounced in the second and third generations—those of non-European nationality but born in Europe. They feel at home neither in Europe nor in their parents' homelands. This disaffection manifests itself in school disciplinary problems, occasional riots like those in the Paris suburbs, and conversion to Islamic radicalism, particularly in Britain. Laqueur is clear, however, that European Islam is not monolithic.

Another internal problem cited by Laqueur is the inevitable decline of the European welfare state. Laqueur argues that the welfare state made remarkable gains as long as Europe was achieving high economic growth, but that its benefits will have to be cut back as the population declines and ages. He says that the welfare state could be maintained with modest benefit cuts and/or tax increases but correctly notes the tremendous resistance to any such changes.

Laqueur feels that the defeat of the proposed European constitution in French and Dutch referendums caused a stall in the march toward European unity, and as yet there is no agreement on how much further unification will proceed. In terms of Europe's status as a world power, he points out that there is no European ability outside of a US-led NATO to project power. Significantly, he says that some parts of Europe in the future may have Muslim majorities but that Muslim separatism is unlikely, so there may emerge bi-national states within Europe.

Conclusion

By reading both these books, non-European, especially American, readers can gain essential background for deeper understanding of contemporary European affairs. The book group agreed that, no matter what the future brings, there will be no effort to undo the remarkable progress that has been made since World War II in unifying Europe. Even Laqueur notes the great achievements in European

unification and of the European welfare state. What is at issue is how many more countries will join the European Union, how closely they will integrate, and whether the Europeans will be able to solve some fairly serious internal problems. The rest of the world will be watching with great interest.

POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM (send comments to forum@futuretakes.org):

- *With which viewpoint do you agree – Leonard’s or Laqueur’s – and why?*
- *Are the “regional clubs,” as described by Leonard, the successors to nation-states and to classic military alliances? Considering alternate geostrategic environments that may emerge and the diminishing role of nation-states, which instrument of national power (economic, diplomatic, military, or other) may be most relevant in 2018? Take into account the cultural preferences for near-term vs. long-term results.*
- *To what extent will diverse (and perhaps competing) interest limit the size of “regional clubs”?*
- *Laqueur’s case of a Europe in decline is based largely on demographics. How might other factors – for example, energy geopolitics, food geopolitics, environmental changes, and the rise and fall of other regions – aggravate or mitigate the demographic challenges to Europe? (see Aguilar-Millan scenario, Winter 2007-2008 issue, Mack article on agriculture, this issue, and demographic factors identified in Iyanatullah’s article and Taljaard’s article, both in this issue)*
- *If indeed Europe is in decline as Laqueur argues, can the European way still be the way of the world in an inspirational sense as Leonard suggests?*
- *In which nations or regions are demographic trends favorable for economic growth and/or sustainment? (also see Taljaard’s article this issue)*