

Sarajevo

Dan Diner

Geography is destiny. For a long time Europe seemed distant from that space which once had been its bane. It was kept safe from itself, paradoxically, by the Cold War. In the womb, in the hard shell of the Cold War Europe had become European. This protection from itself is now dissolving, from the inside as well as from the outside. We fear the return of the ghosts and phantoms of the past. We do not expect an exact repetition of past dangers, but there is a cumulation of dangers flickering at Europe's borders and threatening to fuse dramatically with its inner conflicts.

As regards the seismic disturbances from outside, the old European earthquake area towards the East of the continent is starting to tremble. Along old fracture lines a trench is running - as yet not highly visible - from the Baltic towards the Black Sea, from there through the straits towards the Aegean and then to the Levant. The shock waves are originating in Russia, a Russia which desperately seeks to become certain of itself and in the process increasingly troubles its new-old neighbourhood. The tension reaches to the Balkans as well as to that core of Europe where the old European rivalries have run down and become, as it were, neutralized. Still, different cultures of economic practice and budget efficiency seem to fuel forgotten contradictions in Europe anew. The Euro, a currency intended to limit the economic power of recently reunited Germany, looks to others just like another Deutsche Mark - as if Germany were damned, willy nilly, to play the role of Europe's hegemon. This - the perspective from the European East says - goes as well for the political morality upheld by Germany. Differences in political culture have been revealed by the migration debate, differences which point back to the different modes through which the past has been experienced. Publicly voiced fears that globalization makes people strangers in their own country have furthered the growth of parties advocating a withdrawal into an "identity" of one's own and therefore away from Europe.

Is an older Europe, the historical Europe which defined itself by the opposition of nations, returning? The return of geopolitical explanations, a pattern of thinking in spaces and borders seems to overwhelm that Europe which defines itself by institutions. The process has been experienced in Sarajevo at the end of the dramatic 20th century as a repetition of history. Today, at the beginning of the 21st, the patterns of the Nineteenth Century seem to set the agenda for the debate.