

EU will sink under regulation, it must go for innovation and productivity instead

By Conrad Black

Carl Bildt, a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden and senior official in various capacities of the European Union, has long been one of the most rational and articulate exponents of the most positive aspects of what is still called by those who work at it, the European Project.



Carl Bildt, the EU needs to try for competitiveness not regulation (Photo by Michael Campanella/Getty Images)

insights as well as his elegant and affable personality. In the Gulf Times of Qatar of June 25, he gave his interpretation of the recent European elections and offered some interesting reflections on the near future for Europe.

Although, from a British perspective and as a member of the parliament of that country, I have never been a Euro-

Because of the accident of the alphabet, we often sat next to each other at international meetings for many years. I came to appreciate his learned political and strategic

federalist, the concept of durable peace, economic collaboration, and relative ease of trade and movement amongst the 27 countries now in the European Union is nothing less than an inspiring consummation of the history of the European nation-state.

In the 180 years from France's entry into the Thirty Years' War in 1635 to the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, France was engaged in a major war with a major European power for 99 nine of those years and sustained approximately three million combat-related deaths in that time.

The contrast with the last 79 years since World War II, in which France has not engaged in any combat in Europe could not be more stark or more satisfactory. Some of the European powers have had an even more sanguinary experience in that time, especially Germany, most of whose constituents went through all of the Thirty Years' War and numerous other conflicts.

Of course, Europe enjoyed nearly a century of comparative peace between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the beginning of World War I, and the only conflicts between the Great Powers in that time were the Crimean War and the Franco-Prussian War.

But as all the world knows, Europe resurrected its history of bloodletting with a terrible vengeance in allowing peace to be on a hair-trigger, determined by the caprices of terribly underqualified royal autocrats related to each other but gambling the lives of tens of millions with the insouciance of children playing with high explosives.

The system dominated by the Romanovs, the Hohenzollerns, and the Habsburgs gave way in the interwar period to the Communists and the Nazis and the hecatomb of the World Wars, concluding with the dawn of the atomic age, presented mankind with the real possibility of universal destruction.

With this perspective, the movement of almost all of Europe toward democratic government, a relatively free market economy, and the absolute prevalence of peace between them, has been an uplifting achievement.

With all that said, Carl Bildt wrote of the United States as an innovative superpower, China as a production superpower, and Europe as a regulatory superpower.

Here, in a word, is the current European problem.

The United States is also a production superpower – and there is no such thing as a regulatory superpower. Europe is overregulated.

For historically notorious reasons, post-war Europe has paid Dane geld to its working class and small farmers, and comparative political peace has been bought by relatively high taxes and unmeritocratic wealth redistribution.

If Europe wishes to achieve or approach the political stature of China and even the United States, it must be an innovative and production superpower also and it will never get there by fussing and fidgeting about climate change, which Carl cites is one of Europe's strong points.

Western Europe has only started to escape from the social democratic fantasyland with airtight protection provided courtesy of the taxpayers of the United States. During the Cold War, when the Soviet Union and the USA could be represented as substantially equivalent geopolitical forces, and the neutralist pseudo-allies like Willie Brandt and Pierre Trudeau and even the Swedes of the time could rush to Moscow with their coattails trailing behind them and pretend they were slightly affecting the close balance in the correlation of forces, the United States had no choice but to assure that force levels were adequate to deter the Soviet Union in central Europe.

Russia now has less than half the population of the USSR and a GDP smaller than Canada's and has been unable to win a war with a much smaller and less well-armed neighbour, albeit with NATO providing most of the equipment and ordnance.

The real problem plaguing the EU institutions is their lack of functioning democracy: once installed, the commissioners do what they want and the parliament that was elected last week is a talking shop with no authority.

This is the main reason why Britain departed. Unlike the French and Italians, Britain likes to be law-abiding but unlike the Germans, it is unaccustomed to regimentation and wishes to obey laws that are sensible and democratically arrived at and administered.

Carl Bildt in his piece for the Qataris, predicted a Trump administration "that openly abandons allies and dismantles or de-fangs key pillars of the international order – including the World Trade Organization, the World Health Organization, global climate agreements, and NATO – will pose an altogether different and greater challenge."

This is a widespread European fear, and it is unfounded. The WTO and WHO have been gamed by China, "global climate agreements" are bunk and nobody except a few of the more simpleminded Europeans pays any attention to them. All the United States want from NATO is for the other parties to do what they have pledged to do.

The North Atlantic alliance is one of mutually supporting democratic states, not a permanent and unlimited security free-lunch for European and Canadian slackers. The big losers in the European elections were the Greens and the chief takeaway is that the four major member states, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, are all moving from the soft left to the responsible and moderate right. So are the United States and Canada, and the entire West will be better for it.

First published in the [Brussels Signal](#)