

Strategy of Sentimentality in EU Foreign Policy

Andrei A. Sushentsov

Andrei A. Sushentsov, PhD in Political Science
MGIMO University, Moscow, Russia
School of International Relations
Dean;
Department of Applied International Analysis
Associate Professor

ORCID: 0000-0003-2076-7332

E-mail: asushentsov@gmail.com

Address: Room 3036, 76 Vernadsky Prospect, Moscow 119454, Russia

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The Ukraine crisis has set in motion the processes of a global divide between the West and the Non-West. In Europe, the new watershed means a military-political confrontation between Russia and NATO, following the patterns of the deep European security crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, when the parties were close to a nuclear war, but one never took place. Outside the European continent, the non-West is now actively taking stock of its relations with the Euro-Atlantic states.

In mid-2022, German President Steinmeier complained that the escalation of the Ukraine crisis had shattered “the dream of a common

European home in peace ... in its place the nightmare prevailed.”¹ The German president can be congratulated: the emerging fear of one’s own helplessness is useful—it can mobilize one’s political will to solve long-standing problems. It is high time for the EU to abandon its strategy of sentimentality: high-flown mantras, complacent summits, and false-hearted handshakes, not backed by goals, resources, and the determination to make sacrifices. However, the Europeans are not able to appreciate the significance of the Ukraine crisis and the vital nature of Russia’s interests, having long lost the habit of thinking for themselves. The vacation from strategic thinking continues.

Strategic thinking can only emerge when a crisis of a vital nature presents itself, such as when a country is fighting for independence, economic survival, or reassembling itself after a civil war. After such a catastrophe, the gained experience is generalized and passed on to the next generation of elites through the education system: the experience is then converted into textbooks, into professors and into tradition. Such a tradition becomes the necessary “general knowledge” for people in the four key types of public service: civil, diplomatic, military, and special. Only in this way can a consensus be formed in the political elite about national interests, about the means and resources needed to achieve them, and sacrifices to be made. The last three generations of European politicians have been engaged in “European negotiation exercises”—a lighter version of strategic rivalry that creates a false perception of the realities of world politics. Living in cotton wool has led to the degradation of the four public services in European states and to their inability to formulate the vital interests of their countries.

How was European strategic thinking defined before? Five hundred years ago, the French would have said that their main goal was to prevent the English from landing at Calais. Two hundred years ago, the French would have said it was necessary to contain Britain and prevent the victory of the conservative powers that were trying to stifle the revolution. A hundred years ago, the Germans were the main enemy, and fifty years ago, in Gaullist France, the Anglo-Saxon powers were seen as opponents of continental

¹ www.americanpost.news/german-president-accuses-putin-of-breaking-the-era-of-a-europe-in-peace/

Europe. In today's Europe, there is no unequivocal enemy for France: that is why neither the mobilization of resources nor attention is required. For the past seventy years, the political elites in Europe have not raised the question of what their vital national interests are.

So fear is a useful thing in such a situation.

The loss of the habit of thinking strategically has left Europe with a deeply distorted perception of Russia's interests in the Ukraine crisis and with an inconsistent strategy of its own. When the hostilities began, the Europeans deliberately applied the U.S. experience in Iraq to Moscow: in their opinion, Russia would use all available forces and means to immediately gain overwhelming superiority, decapitate the political leadership in Kiev, and suppress disorganized resistance with missile strikes.

Then, after the departure of Russian troops from the Kiev and Chernigov regions, a new strategy appeared in Europe: since Russia does not have enough resources, it is necessary to provide maximum support to Ukraine and supply it with weapons; and, as Josep Borrell said, "this war must be won on the battlefield"² rather than at the negotiating table. In June, a third version of the strategy was produced: it turns out that Russia may still have vital interests in Ukraine. Moscow is demonstrating great skill at maneuvering its forces and means, in fact, choosing the direction of strikes, and at the same time reshaping the world's economic ties, in which, as it turns out, its share is quite big. There are voices in the West again in favor of negotiating with Russia, preferably before winter begins. There is no guarantee though that a month from now Europe will not reconsider its view of Ukrainian developments and will not come up with another strategy for interacting with Moscow.

Such fluctuations testify that the crisis will not bring about a revolution of consciousness among the European elites. The Americans are already close to invoking the "Nixonian formula" that was used in Vietnam—the "Guam Doctrine for Ukraine": "We are for the Ukrainization of the conflict, we supply weapons, and the rest is up to you." As for Europe itself, Americans continue to look at the continent not only as an area of their security responsibility, but also as a development resource, a region where they will draw resources in the coming decades as their relationship

² <https://thefrontierpost.com/borrell-this-war-must-be-won-on-the-battlefield/>

with China becomes increasingly confrontational. Using the anti-Russian phobias of the Baltic and Eastern European countries, the United States will maintain points of tension on the borders with Russia and sell resources to the Europeans at exorbitant prices, while sanctions pressure and trade wars will push capital to flow to the American market.

As long as these constants remain, it would be premature to raise the question of a New Yalta. The decisions at the Yalta Conference of the Big Three were the product of a global catastrophe in which tens of millions of people had been killed. Elites in all countries around the world simultaneously realized the harmfulness of war, as well as the need for a respite in order to restore strength and rebuild the devastated countries. These people, who ruled Europe for the following forty years, built the European order with a constant eye on the past catastrophe, recognizing that their vital interest was to prevent a major confrontation. The Ukraine crisis, tragic as it is, remains a regional crisis—it has not produced the same catastrophic consequences, although some of them are felt on a global scale.

Needless to say, the risk of a nuclear escalation is significant—in such a scenario, the Ukraine conflict will rapidly develop into the hotbed of a new world war in Europe. At this stage, however, the Ukraine crisis has set in motion the processes of a global divide between the West and the Non-West. In Europe, the new watershed means a military-political confrontation between Russia and NATO, following the patterns of the deep European security crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, when the parties were close to a nuclear war, but one never took place. Outside the European continent, the non-West is now actively taking stock of its relations with the Euro-Atlantic states. Turkey has questions for Finland and Sweden, and even having changed its name from Turkey to Türkiye, it is hindering NATO expansion. The Indian prime minister at a QUAD session started speaking in Hindi on principle, creating a real embarrassment with the translation, for which the parties were not prepared. The UAE rejected U.S. demands to remove Russia from the OPEC+ deal. These seem to be small details, but they were impossible just two years ago, and clearly signify the emergence of increasingly mature polycentricity in the world. Strategic sentimentality is quite dangerous in this world.