



The European State System at a Crossroads

19 February 2022 - 2 Comments



by Leo Klinkers |

A discourse between Dr Leo Klinkers, President Federal Alliance of European Federalists (FAEF) and Dr Ingo Piepers, Commander Dutch contribution to the UN Rapid Reaction Force during the Balkan war in the early 1990s. This article is partly derived from a processing of Piepers' analysis of the evolution of the European state system since 1500, described in Chapter 2 of FAEF's Constitutional and Institutional Toolkit for Establishing the Federal United States of Europe [1]

February 19, 2022

Leo Klinkers to Ingo Piepers:

Dear Ingo, I would like to know what you think about the following considerations.

Like every human being, Putin is guided by his neuroses. With most people, those neuroses are in balance with each other. With some they are not. Then we talk about behavioural disorders. Putin has the neuroses of a strong man, an autocrat.

Professor Emeritus Manfred Kets de Vries – connected to the management institute INSEAD (Paris) – has devoted his scientific career in psychoanalysis to explaining behavioural disorders of leaders of organisations. His books 'The Neurotic Organisation' and 'Leaders, Fools and Deceivers' are gems of clarity on the rationale of irrational and destructive behaviour of leaders. This applies a fortiori to the neuroses of a strong man. Trying to have a rational conversation with an autocrat is pointless. Facts and arguments do not count. Biden and Putin's telephone conversations are – as they both know – ritual conversations without meaning.

A strong man cannot stand losing, let alone losing face. After having built up a lot of military power around Ukraine, Putin cannot afford to withdraw his troops because the West is building up a military counterforce, plus a package of non-military sanctions. The whole world would laugh at him, and he would lose his geopolitical influence. To save face, he will and must want to annex some Ukraine anyway. Otherwise, he will have shown his muscles for nothing.

Putin has succeeded in getting the Russian parliament, the Duma, to pass a motion calling on Putin to recognise the two 'people's republics' in eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk) as independent republics. This way these two parts of Ukraine can allow Putin to occupy them with Russian troops. They will then be Russian territory, without a violent Russian invasion. Although this parliamentary motion is only a piece of paper with no international constitutional value, it is not without significance. It presents the West with a dilemma: help Ukraine maintain its sovereignty by attacking the Russians in Ukraine's east or opt for a diplomatic solution. That can only end in a treaty where the West allows these parts to be (not legally but actually) Russian territory from then on.

In that chess game another dilemma is hiding, namely a repeat of the Chamberlain naïveté: a treaty (to prevent a world war) like the one in Munich in September 1938 in which Germany, France and England agreed that Hitler could keep Sudetenland and Austria if he promised to stop annexing countries that did not belong to him. Hitler signed the treaty but had other plans.

The current situation is very similar to that of 1938-1939. After annexing part of Georgia and Ukraine (Crimea) with the motive 'they are originally Russian', Putin did what Hitler did with Austria and Sudeten Germany with impunity. Putin will sign a treaty giving him Eastern Ukraine and promise never to lay claim to another country again. But he already has other plans. Just like Hitler. It turned out that Hitler wanted a corridor through Poland to the German enclave/port city of Gdansk. He invaded Poland and then France and England had to declare war on him.

The pieces on Putin's chessboard have the same position as Hitler's in 1939. The Gdansk of then is the Kaliningrad (Konigsbergen) of now. A Russian enclave, wedged between Lithuania and Poland, and thus cut off from Russia. Kaliningrad has an ice-free Russian port on the Baltic Sea with military significance. Putin is free to demand a corridor to Kaliningrad or to enforce it by force. But then he would have to go through Lithuania or Poland. And that triggers Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. Or, to avoid violence, agree to Putin's demand again, step into the trap of a meaningless treaty and wait for Putin's next move to claim parts of the Baltic States.

Moral? If he is not stopped, Putin will continue to put pressure on the West with ever new claims to parts of Eastern Europe – whether or not they are already EU Member States – after which the West – in order to avoid an all-out war – will continue with a treaty to keep the temporary peace, to the detriment of the country that has to give up part of its territory to Putin.

The West does not stand a chance against the manipulative power of a strong man. Ratio, morality, integrity, international law? It is all irrelevant to someone driven by the 'strong man syndrome'. He cannot, and will not, do otherwise. One way or another, the West will be provoked again and again into using violence or treaties. This is instrumental to Putin's only goal: to remain an autocrat for as long as possible and hopefully become president for life at the elections in 2024.

In such an area of tension, treaties only serve to postpone execution. They do not work if one of the parties does not have the interest in abiding by them. Treaty -anarchy is of all times. Certainly within the EU, which is making a fool of itself with its increasing internal conflicts and absence of any geopolitical influence. It is not an unambiguous EU leadership, but representatives of two member states, Scholz and Macron, who are conducting the talks with Biden and Putin. Worse still: they do not agree with each other.

It shows the identity crisis of the EU, its last stage of its political lifecycle before it collapses. It has run out of energy: entropy is doing its natural work. After this crisis, the evolution of the European system of states awaits its next phase: a federal Europe based on a federal constitution. With one common defence force for five hundred million European citizens. So, with geopolitical significance.

Ingo, my argument is based on a 'behavioural approach'. With your knowledge of the development of the European system of states over the past centuries, can you elaborate on this point of view with another approach?

...

Ingo Piepers to Leo Klinkers:

Well, Leo, Putin's behavior can certainly be better understood, if in addition to your analysis, a systems perspective is also used to analyze current developments and Putin's behavior and choices.

In my analysis I will also explain that admittedly the global crisis that is now looming poses an existential threat to Europe, but therein lies a great opportunity: the advent of a new European system of states in the form of a federal Europe, as the final step in a development process that already started around 1500.

Let me elaborate on this.

In the past five hundred years, Europe has developed from a diverse collection of some three hundred loosely connected entities ('mini-states' and kingdoms) with just over 80 million inhabitants around the year 1500, into a tightly coupled system consisting of some thirty standardized states, with almost 550 million inhabitants in 1939. A fundamental transition has already taken place, but we are not there yet.

During this process of growth and development, societies that increasingly organised themselves into states were repeatedly confronted with the same paradox: namely, that they became more and more dependent on each other for their well-being and security, while at the same time, the political, economic, and ideological competition and rivalries between those same states intensified.

This paradox, which is inherent in the functioning of the anarchist international system, generated increasing tensions, which had to be regulated because of the obstacles they created. This paradox consequently functioned as a driver for developments and adjustments, including for the organisation of political alliances, which played a role in this.

Wars were – and still are – functional for the regulation of tensions in the international system and were – and still are – instrumental in a process of state formation and scaling-up that is taking place in Europe. Europe as we know it today, came about by trial and error – with the necessary growth pains. It certainly did not happen by itself.

The Second World War, which started in 1939 as the fourth European system war, marked a turning point in that growth and development process. The Second World War was preceded by three other system wars, which at that time also had a major impact on the organization of the international system: the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648); the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815), and the First World War (1914-1918).

The 'clash of energies' that the Second World War produced, had two complementary effects: the collapse of the European state system and the simultaneous upscaling to a global system of states. Europe no longer the core of a system it dominated from about 1500. The outcome of the Second World War, the new balance of power and rules of the new international order, were subsequently anchored in the United Nations.

Although the United Kingdom and France were allocated a permanent seat with veto power in the Security Council of the United Nations (UN), only the United States (US) and the Soviet Union (SU) could subsequently manifest themselves as true superpowers in this new system.

The collapse of the European state system did not (yet) result in a European unity (in any form whatsoever) as a logical next step in the development and growth process that had already started around 1500, from 300 'mini states' and kingdoms in 1500, to 30 states in 1939, to a single political structure, as the final step in 1945. The foundations for this had indeed been laid, but the division of Europe after 1945, and the resulting stalemate, did not permit such a final step for some time.

Instead, after the Second World War, two groups of states formed in Europe, with each group under the de facto supervision of one of the two superpowers. Europe thus became the centre of an intense ideological, political, and military confrontation between the US and the SU. Both groups of European states and their respective 'sponsors', formed an alliance, with their own political ideology, security community, and ambitions and direction of development.

However, the Soviet Union proved unable to continue this competition and fell apart in 1991. With the collapse of the Soviet Union as a political entity, Russia, the core state of the Soviet Union, also lost its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. All the gains and achievements that the Second World War had brought were lost to Russia in 1991, including its status as a global superpower. That hurts.

Although it did not end well for the Soviet Union including its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, during the same period (1945-1991) the Western alliance was able to further improve economic and political cooperation and to create considerable prosperity. This part of Europe had developed more and more as a community of values. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of control over its sphere of influence, the success of the democratic Western European alliance acted as a magnet to Eastern European states, which now, in 1991, were finally freed from the Soviet yoke and could decide on their own future.

While the Soviet Union imploded and Russia was subsequently preoccupied with a necessary reorientation and consolidation based on a new political system, the European community of values expanded, and its organization acquired more and more shape and structure. The process of European expansion and development had gained a new powerful impetus, with the collapse of the Soviet-Union. NATO, too, meanwhile, expanded in eastern direction, while Russia was licking its wounds.

However, it also became increasingly clear that in the development and formation of European unity, from an economic community (1957) to a political union (1993), there were – and still are – several serious constructional errors, which increasingly hamper the effectiveness and efficiency of that political union.

This political cooperation was not based on a European constitution with a matching federal organisation, but consisted, and still consists, of an increasingly complex patchwork of all kinds of treaties between European states. As a result, the NATO to govern and administer the European Union was and is increasingly undermined, and Europe – mostly preoccupied with internal matters – is unable to rise above itself.

Europe as a political entity has developed by muddling through, and by again and again adding to a complicated system of treaties in which it has become entangled. Consequently, the European Union is stuck in a self-imposed trap of which it cannot simply get rid of. The European Union has consequently not become a fully-fledged and mature political structure; that is, a federation that can effectively represent the interests of its constituent states, as circumstances require, and that can ensure that also in the long term, the values that the European Union stands for are effectively safeguarded.

As a result of the current organisation, Europe lacks governance and administrative capacity in several crucial policy areas; for example, when it comes to Europe's security and defence, which now urgently require a federal European approach.

When it comes to foreign policy and defence, European states still operate on their own (behalf), and only when its suits them a European interest is involved, as it is defined by these states themselves. As a result, there is no unified European goal, no unity of policy, and no efficient use of resources.

Another factor that plays a role in this and hinders the development of the European Union into a federation, is that the United Kingdom and France – and not the European Union – have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Neither European power will relinquish this influence and status lightly. The privileges and exposure that the permanent seat in the Security Council brings the United Kingdom and France, is too tempting, not to exploit for their own narrowly defined national interests.

But in the meantime, the world is not standing still, and competitors eagerly take advantage of these shortcomings in and of Europe. From 1991 onwards, especially during the last decade, the European Union has been increasingly exposed to disintegrating and centrifugal forces that put pressure on European unity. The standard reflex of the European Union typically was, and still is, to adapt the deficient capacity to govern and administer with even more treaties. But that does obviously not work; it is precisely this complex system of treaties that has created this unworkable situation. Instead, a fundamental reorganization is urgently needed.

This institutionalized lack of capacity of the European Union to govern and administer, was reason for the United Kingdom to leave the Union in 2020. The United Kingdom had become convinced that it could better represent its interests outside the European Union.

Meanwhile, under Putin's leadership, Russia has reinvented itself and regained its self-confidence. Putin (and other autocrats) has a fundamentally different idea of the function of the state and the political system than the member states of the European Union. That is shown time and again. Putin's objective is not primarily to create a prosperous and peaceful Russia, but to maintain his position of power and influence to promote his own interests, and of his vassals. In his ambitions and aspirations, Putin draws inspiration from the superpower status and influence of the former Soviet Union, which was lost in 1991. More often results achieved in the past, provide inspiration for the future, as is not only the case with Russia, but also for the UK, which, with Brexit, is in its way harking back to past glory that should be restored.

Initially, Putin has explored whether and to what extent Russia can restore its (lost) sphere of influence and the resistance he can expect in doing so. No doubt he was encouraged by the weak response of Europe, NATO, and the US to the annexation of Crimea and parts of Ukraine in 2014. Russia also proved capable of playing a decisive role in Syria, for example.

These initial successes gave Putin and Russia the necessary self-confidence and encouraged to take follow-up steps. The successes achieved call for more, and Putin now feels emboldened enough to lay his cards on the table: NATO is to withdraw from Eastern Europe, and Russia reclaims its 'own' sphere of influence.

The current conflict is therefore not (only) about Ukraine, where Putin has now set his sights on, but is about the security architecture of Europe. The Ukraine has become a clash of political ideologies and values. This conflict goes to the heart of Europe and what the European Union stands for. European history is now repeating itself in a sense: a local bully – this time it is Russia – is claiming control over the rest of Europe, and a standard script is being played out to turn that illusion into reality: Europe has been here before and must now act in unity.

The European Union, however, is too weak recent developments not surprisingly show, and consequently only plays a negligible role in this existential crisis that is looming.

It is once again the United States that takes the lead and is considered by Russia the only fully-fledged interlocutor, also when it comes to Europe. The fragile and ineffective organization of the European Union, and its laborious relationship with the United Kingdom, that now wants to distinguish itself, offer Putin an opportunity to sow discord. While Europe is (again) unable to join forces, Putin creates a political playing field, he can exploit.

Putin also seems to assume that NATO has been weakened, because the United States is now giving priority to Asia, and thus to containing China, and no longer to Europe. While during the Second World War for the United States the imperative was 'Europe First', now it is 'Asia First'. This is an opportunity for Russia. Europe should be aware of this shift in priorities and the advantages it could bring for Russia. In the (near) future, Europe will have to rely more on itself, and will therefore also have to towards a federal structure, if it wants to be able to safeguard its interests – and values. The significance of this reorientation by the United States, however, has escaped Europe's notice. If the European Union's lackluster reaction in the Ukraine matter is an indication.

Russia's provocations and actions in Europe also offer China interesting perspectives. China also aspires to a larger and exclusive sphere of influence, in the South and East China Sea. What Ukraine is to Russia, Taiwan is to China.

The current international order, dominated by the US, from which Europe derives its prosperity and security, hinders the ambitions of Russia and China.

If military capabilities – hard power – are the yardstick, then Russia and China probably have no chance against the United States, if they operate on their own.

Their prospects for their expensive ambitions are much more favorable, however, if Russia and China decide to coordinate their provocations and actions, and certainly if they are also assisted in this by countries such as Iran, Venezuela, Cuba and possibly North Korea. Then the US – and therefore Europe – have a serious problem.

There is a lot at stake now, certainly for Europe. Europe faces a number of significant challenges, which it cannot effectively cope with now. The stakes are not just the territory of a state (Ukraine or Taiwan), but the European and global order, and the values and standards that underpin them.

In the global crisis that is now looming, Europe – the European Union – finds itself at an existential crossroads: either Europe disintegrates and marginalizes further as a political player of any significance, or this crisis becomes instrumental in and is used by Europe to accomplish the next logical step in the process of political unification – the creation of a European Federation – which was already set in motion back in 1500.

Although the process of scaling up is fraught with ups and downs, and growth pains are inevitable, as I mentioned before, it does contain a certain logic, namely that by means of cooperation – scaling up – economies of scope and scale can be achieved, which leads to greater prosperity and security for all concerned. This is a self-reinforcing process from 1500 onwards, as shown by the development and dynamics of the European system of states. Democracy guarantees freedom of choice, mutual respect, and that people can optimally develop and use their own talents for the benefit of the society of which they are a part. That is a strong force, which has stimulated and guided the development of Europe, so far.

But we're not there yet. An important hurdle must now be overcome, namely that we now implement a federal organization based on a European Constitution, so that the talents of the people can be developed and use, based on the European values that have become central to our identity. Safeguarding our European values and interests requires intensified cooperation in Europe and a joining of forces, within a federal framework. The Federal Alliance of European Federalists provides a concrete vision to that end, a matching blueprint, and a concrete action plan to achieve this.

In the end, by their actions, Putin and his autocratic companions get what they fear most.

[1] See <https://www.faeu.eu/wp-content/uploads/Constitutional-Toolkit.pdf>

Dr. Leo Klinkers President of the Federal Alliance of European Federalists (FAEF) President of the Federalism for Peace Foundation

Previous Post: Development should schedule a popular vote for a European Federal Constitution. Next Post: What caused EU's geopolitical irrelevance in the Ukrainian drama?

THIS POST HAS 2 COMMENTS

Javier Giner 19 FEBRUARY 2022 Excellent article ... even more memorable ... !!! In my opinion, more emphasis is needed on the role that China plays now, but especially in the coming years. Therefore, the role of Europe with the future Federal Constitution should deepen relations with Russia in order to avoid treaties to guarantee peace in Europe but rather to develop a period of trust with Russia to work out peace with Russia.

Christian Sciberras 19 FEBRUARY 2022 Tiny correction on the map graphic: Kaliningrad (the white spot between Poland and Lithuania) is a Russian enclave and should be shaded in orange as well.

Leave a Reply Your comment here...

Name (required) Email (required) Website

POST COMMENT

Europe Today 31,750 volgers Pagina volgen This sums it up. European Art 14,485 volgers

INTERVIEWS BY OUR DIRECTOR The Union, the Euro and the Single Market are the only possible answer to...

Leo Klinkers Fede... 00:00 02:24

RECENT ARTICLES The Decline of Democracy in Spain: can it be reversed? Occupation, oppression and exploitation When will the UN take responsibility?

Federating the world to tackle global existential threats

Weather In Europe



Wheather by: Sat24