EuroPOLIS

Markus C. Kerber

Can Europe survive ?

David Marsh's inspiring book on Europe's past and future considers a serious, indeed profound question. Consequently it deserves diligent, insightful perusal and scrutiny rather than ritual endorsement by establishment figures.

In the 1970s, the French political philosopher *Julien Freund* – alumnus of *Raymond Aron* and admirer of *Carl Schmitt* – made a striking prognosis in his book on decadence. According to his penetrating analysis, Europe was on the path of decline but that path would not be inevitable, if courageous statesmen confronted and reversed the trend.[1]

David Marsh in his most recent book raises the same fundamental questions and guides the reader of his sophisticated prose through the post-1989 history of the continent. He is well positioned for such a historic review followed by some thought provoking proposals to enhance European "resilience". His network of interviewees comprises an impressive number of experts and statesmen who contribute their insights to the text. Some, perhaps superfluously, also add personal endorsements to David Marsh's great publication.[2]

Marsh's analysis of the old continent is interesting though not particularly original. In the opening chapter ‚The Reckoning' - as in the rest of the book - Marsh skillfully assembles a formidable number of interesting quotations and insightful background comments, of undoubtedly competent voices from world politics. These not only give apparent weight to his description, but adds to the fluidity of his prose. However, the sheer volume of quotations leaves the reader guessing what are Marsh's opinions and what are those of the highly qualified people he interviewed. At times, journalism seems to take precedence over analysis. The reliance upon spoken commentary and the deficit of demarcation sometimes leaves palpable omissions in the narrative.

For example, Marsh believes that Europe suffers from a lack of financial power.[3] Yet by a series of legal contortions, the EU has contrived a ‚Next Generation' (NG) fund of 800 billion Euros by raising debt to historic dimensions. The Eurozone has equipped itself with a European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) of 500 billion Euros, followed by the European Stabilisation Mechanism (ESM) of a further 500 billion Euros of fire power.[4] Additionally the EU has regulated that the ESM could become a lender of last resort for the European Single Resolution Board which is the key agency within the so

[1] Julien Freund, L'Europe décadente ?, preface by Serge Sur de l'Institut, Berlin 2020, Edition Europolis
[2] See the accurate list author interviews (p. 450 ff.) and the list of endorsements
[3] Marsh op.cit. p. 57 f.
[4] Not to forget the 80 bill. Euro European Stability fund ubscribed by the EU

called Banking Union. At the time of writing this review, the EU Commission is devising a „Reparation bond“ for Ukraine and is on the point of finalising regulation on the financing of a European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP).[5] Have these developments escaped David Marsh's attention ?

The biggest problem facing Europe – contrary to what Draghi, von der Leyen and all high-debt countries claim - is not a lack of financial fire power but the self referential use of European funds - either from the budget or through the above-mentioned vehicles – in support of vested-interest groups. The NG EU fund of 800 billion Euros has been used to the extent of less than 500 billion Euros. The European Court of Auditors, in distinctly lukewarm endorsements, have reported that the fund's administration leaves room for improvement. The positioning of a Pole as EU Commissioner for the budget leaves the country which is the biggest net recipient of EU funds, at the helm of its finances. A special governance, or perhaps a glaringly obvious conflict of interest?

Mention must be made of the intriguingly insightful chapters of David Marsh's reporting on what was happening here and there, when important statesmen and stateswomen met after midnight in endless talks about the world's destiny. The curious reader is impressed by the intimate knowledge David Marsh must have had about all these low-profile encounters. From an anecdotal point of view, Marsh's wonderful prose faciliates the enlightening perusal of European history.

Such an immense book as David Marsh's *opus magnum* deserves particular scrutiny when the final chapter deals with his proposal for Europe's survival[6].

Much space is again given to established voices like Mario Draghi whose analysis of Europe missing the train of growth is not really original. His prescription is a clumsy, pseudo-academic exercise which attempts to justify one proposal: more money for innovative investments. Marsh seems to agree as he argues that Europe should and could develop world class technology for environmental technology and for sustainable energy industries.[7] However he omits to explain and prove why and how the NG EU initiative will be of „significant value“.[8]

Moreover, he favors a reshaping of the European defence industry landscape and apparently endorses the UK-German agreement of October 2024[9]. But the question must be asked of how the agreement could operate in practice, in the face of long-established French chauvinsm in the arena of defence industry ? Emancipation from the US arms industry will not be possible by recourse to France. Marsh acknowledges this problem when quoting the warning of France's Eric Trappier, CEO of Dassault, that to „ buy American“ might lead to a dead end as France has been always striving to substitute US hegemony by French hegemony[10]. All German-French projects of armament cooperation hitherto, have lain bare the „rêve francais“: France as the controlling force; Germany as financier and subcontractor. This is a continuing

[5] EU Commission's draft 5.3.2024 Com (2024)150b final
[6] Chapter 8
[7] Op.cit. p. 329
[8] Op.cit. p.331
[9] Op.cit. p. 335
[10] See Kerber, Europe without France ?

nightmare for Germany and does not represent a realistic or desirable prescription for Europe.

In his final if not decisive proposal, Marsh refers to the Financial Times's Peter Foster[11]. Marsh hints at the disadvantages of the UK even after the EU-UK trade and Cooperation agreement. Surprisingly enough he does not take the opportunity to develop the theme from a German point of view although he also posesses a German citizenship. The UK's plight in terms of trade and cooperation with continental Europe, could only be set right by a German initiative to create a common market between the UK and Germany. France and her caretakers in Brussels such as Mrs. von der Leyen would be politically opposed and would invoke the exclusive EU-competence in trade policy[12]. That would be a welcome opportunity to show how obsolete this exclusive competence has become, in the light of totally heterogeneous interests of 27 member states which have been laid bare in the face of Trump's trade tariff policy.

One blemish remains on this wonderful book. A work of such quality does not merit the foreword of a man whose judgement does not measure up to that of his predecessor and who by his plea in favor of euro-bonds has advocated French interests and undermined the Bundesbank's authority. David Marsh's great book would have been served better by an advocate of higher standing.

But taken in the round, David Marsh's superbly written analysis of Europe's decline and possible destiny provides an ample opportunity to open a radical debate on remedies until now avoided by party politicians.

[11] Op.cit. p. 347

[12] See Art. 206 TFEU