

“There will be no peace in Europe...”

“There will be no peace in Europe if the States are reconstituted on the basis of national sovereignty (...).” This warning by Jean Monnet - the crux of his seminal reflection from Algiers in the summer of 1943 - keeps running through my head: eighty years later, Monnet's motto sums up the crisis we are currently experiencing.

Europe today, as in the aforementioned period, does not have a decisive voice in the great issues that define tomorrow. Peace or war, calling a spade a spade - a far cry from the artificial hybridization that the term “unpeace” conveys.

Let's go to the Algiers of 1943. In June, the French Committee for National Liberation is formed, with De Gaulle as co-chairman and Jean Monnet among the five founders. That summer, the Red Army of the Soviet Union on the Eastern front and the Allied landing in Sicily marked a turning point in relation to the *Wehrmacht*. The divide is drawn between the supremacy of the Soviet Union (along with the US), and the weakness of Europe and the United Kingdom.

Importantly, at that time, and in line with a deep-rooted, historical tradition, the United Kingdom is considered European only in a broad, fluctuating sense, which also may include Russia. And so, the disputed delineation of Europe's frontiers (which still hangs over our heads and has paralyzed, to a great extent, coordinated action in the 21st century) is already clear in these first post-war designs. Present, too, was the dilemma (as artificial today as it was then) between Atlanticist affiliation - based on fear of the Soviet protectorate - and Continentalist allegiance - stemming from reticence to the Anglo-American (now, simply American) hegemony.

The idea of building beyond sovereignties (a need as conspicuous today as it proved to be in Yalta) is part of the reflection of the different threads of resistance. The voice of the *France Libre*, bypassing Vichy, takes the lead in this quasi-clandestine debate, as the *powers that be* dialogue exclusively among themselves. We are now living a painfully similar situation: Russia only recognized the United States as a direct interlocutor.

In that objectively unfavorable context, Monnet laid the groundwork for the rebirth of Europe. And his idea, which became history, confronts us today.

It is true that we are not at war; but Monnet's intellectual scaffolding presumes a state of peace (our experts would perhaps speak of “unpeace”, according to the abovementioned taxonomy - far from the courage and determination that characterizes the quest of these pioneers). And although Europe's challenge is not “rebuilding”, we have to accept that our survival as a society - one that can determine its future, and defend its principles and values, liberal democracy, the rule of law, and multilateralism - depends on collating national sovereignties.

It is said that Monnet, in those August days of 1943 (the quote is part of a set of meditations dated the 5th) paced back and forth, studying a wall map of the “great” Europe, pondering the nature of the structure that could undo the Gordian knot of “the German question” (with Bismarck's unification in 1871, the weight of Germany - stemming from its wealth and

population - becomes a permanent factor of instability). Monnet's deliberations revolve around how to create a framework that both integrates and disciplines Germany: a "European entity" with an economic and political vocation that he calls a "Federation."

The equivalent of addressing "the German question" in our days is the search for a single European voice in the three areas which define the 21st century: engagement with China, the health of the transatlantic bond, and Russian revisionism.

Let's start with Beijing, a paradigmatic case of the trademark ambiguity that afflicts us: we seek, above all, to be "understanding" (is China a "partner," a "competitor," or a "rival"?). This ambiguity transcends semantics - it is pure vacillation. Although our discrepancies with China are basic, rooted in disparate ways of seeing the world - the primacy of freedom vs. security, citizen vs. collective subject - the dispersion of our national interests and policies defies understanding.

Nor are we clear about what we want with the Americans. On one side, we have Macron with his "we will see" for Biden; on the other, the countries of the East that cling to NATO (and, therefore, to the US) as guarantor of their defense and territorial integrity. And yes, the transatlantic alliance is, as in 1943, of vital importance for Europe. But make no mistake: the US does not have the same relevance or the same interests as it did eighty years ago. Today, it is a fractured society, whose foreign policy "for the middle class" is impregnated with confrontation (because, unlike us, they are clear about what to call their relationship with China). To our "American friend" we are low on the totem pole, as was proven by the unfortunate development of the AUKUS storyline. It is also evident in what, for Europe, represents the biggest international crisis since the end of the Cold War - a crisis we are just beginning to see.

The urgency, the drama, the potential catharsis comes from our eastern neighbor. There are many Europeans who, out of ignorance, indolence, or even conviction, play into the Kremlinian mantra of Russia as a historical victim of hostility - from the outside world in general, and from the West in particular. After a period of weakness caused by the dismantling of the Soviet Union, in this view, Moscow has managed to regain great power status without any help, despite the incomprehension - if not sabotage - of Europe and the US. Putin triumphantly leads the patriotic feat of fighting off alleged aggression and threats to the country's security on its western border, which the US is accused of having plotted in the aftermath of the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century" (the dissolution of the Soviet Union), in the words of the president. This is the philosophy behind his article published last July, which unexpectedly crystallized in the December 17th ultimatum.

Europe is, once again, absent from the conversation surrounding a process that will undoubtedly impact our collective future. Putin has reneged on the Normandy Format and is only addressing the US. NATO today is seen as little more than a multilateralist front for Washington. As for the OSCE conference, it is a sad fig leaf to (poorly) hide the shame of Europe's belittlement. The US Deputy Secretary of State's meeting with our High Representative was a consolatory (if appreciated) formal gesture.

We Europeans don't count - not through our institutions, and not even through France and Germany, as in Minsk. We cannot accept the situation. Europe has to participate as such, as

a Union, coordinating the Member States, particularly the large ones. Not bundled up in the cloak of American power, or waiting in the wings.

We have to react. Our reality is objectively no worse than the one our founding fathers confronted; or the one facing Monnet in August 1943. But we have much to learn from them: ambition of vision, strength of conviction, clarity of exposition and self-confidence. Clinging to national sovereignty, sooner rather than later, "there will be no peace in Europe...".