

EUROPE IN 25 YEARS: WHAT WE WANT, AND WHAT WE WILL PROBABLY GET

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Europe in 25 years: What we want, and what we will probably get

On current trends, most projections for the next 25 years see a fall in Europe's 10.6% share of the global population and of its 30.4% of global GDP. But will this weakened Europe fall prey to the rising powers of 2040? The global situation is becoming more complex than ever, and depending much on developments elsewhere as well as in Europe itself. Globally, the market economy looks likely to remain the norm, and will continue to be international because of all the difficulties involved in opting out. A general return to protectionism is unlikely, but there is also little doubt that greater regulation of the global economy – not just financial and commercial regulation but perhaps social and tax regulation too – will include protective measures for some countries and blocs. Predicting how the “greening” of agriculture, industry, transport, construction, energy and so on will develop isn't easy. The pressures of the economic crisis, let alone those of climate change, coupled with an array of fresh incentives, new regulation and scientific breakthroughs will lead to great progress. Greening will by then have become an indicator of the overall competitiveness of an economy. Europe is well-equipped for this, but it may very well be beaten to the punch by the emerging markets. And in 2040 we will no longer be speaking of emerging, but rather of emerged markets, other than those that may have collapsed or stagnated. Russia will remain a special case, while the divide between developed and emerging countries will have been replaced by a distinction between competitive countries, be they former developed or emerging countries, and those that have simply fallen behind. In geopolitical terms, there are many different possibilities:

- The U.S. makes headway between 2010-2020, while Europe stagnates. The result would be transatlantic divergence.
- Or following the crisis at the end of the present decade, the U.S. and Europe both gain ground, which would constitute a transatlantic renewal.
- Perhaps the U.S. and Europe will both lose ground. The CIA's Global Trends 2030 report forecast Western countries' share in the global economy to fall to 25% by 2030, from 56% today, adding-up to a transatlantic decline.
- Then again, there's the possibility of a decline of the U.S. and the rise of Europe, although that seems highly hypothetical.
- Another scenario is that the U.S. and China form a G2, without Europe.
- Or that the U.S., China and the EU form a G3 that balances out the BRICS. While China is central, there's a risk of geopolitical destabilisation because that would mean a democratisation process of huge proportions in China.
- The EU succeeds in maintaining and increasing its weight on the world stage through a strategic alliance with Russia, or manages to negotiate a Euro-Mediterranean partnership with Turkey, and, after a long period of instability, with the newly democratic countries on the southern Mediterranean shores along with those of Africa.
- Next, there's the possibility of a multipolar system accommodating 12 to 15 powers (the U.S., China, Japan, Russia, Europe, India, Brazil, Mexico, the Pacific Alliance, ASEAN, South Africa and Nigeria). This might create a competitive system based on partnership, but that would also be subject to change and instability.
- Lastly, there's a chaos scenario in which a massive IT bug destroys the networks on which our way of life depends, resulting in worldwide demographic and environmental collapse. To prevent inexorable decline, Europe must reach clear-cut decisions on three big challenges: (1) The best way forward for the eurozone, which means opting for a strengthened and more integrated Europe, although not necessarily truly federal Europe in the strict sense of the term, because that's a concept that will continue to meet widespread popular resistance. With an EU of 28 or 30, or maybe even 35, Britain will undoubtedly wish to remain a member, and Turkey may also join. (2) The precise degree to which there is to be transfer of sovereignty, or more likely its joint exercise at European level, must be democratically accepted by the people. (3) The third challenge is how far enlargement should be taken. There also needs to be a clearer distinction between the European Union and the Eurozone, otherwise it's an issue that will become more intractable than ever. We cannot, of course, exclude the possibility that none of these issues will have been resolved and that the EU's “elite” will go on failing to achieve “more Europe”, while the general population continues either to want less, or at any rate not more. To put it another way, Europe will in that case continue to move from one crisis to another without actually collapsing or falling apart, but will fail to put in place a stable, viable and effective institutional structure, with fixed and accepted limits. European countries' political elites must offer the people the one thing that might lead to reconciliation over the EU's future; an end to over-standardisation and the appropriation of what's left of national sovereignty through absurdly detailed regulation. They must instead put the European system to work to serve the interests of Europeans in a context of the global competition that will be central to all the major multi-lateral negotiations in the years ahead.



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Homepage > Publications > Europe in 25 years: What we want, and what we will probably get



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