

Václav Klaus, *Europe: the Shattering of Illusion*. London, UK:: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2011. 180pp. Hardcopy, ISBN 9781408187647.

Klaus' *Europe: the Shattering of Illusion* provides a unique, but deep political-economic reflection of the ongoing European integration project, in particular its economic and philosophical presumptions, by an economist-turned politician. It is a small but fascinating book worth the reading of those who have great minds. The author himself was a defining figure deeply involved in the project which is the subject matter of the book. He was the first Prime Minister of the Czech Republic from 1993 to 1998, and the second President of the Czech Republic from 2003 to 2013, the second and last Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, federal subject of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic from July 1992 to 1993. His signature is the last one of the European state heads to be added to the Lisbon Treaty—a defining document in the European integration project and European history—to make it valid. The book thus bears deep insights, testifying to the fact that he is “the one senior European politicians who, from within the system, has never-theless been able to continue speaking out for those all-important values and concepts to which his colleagues have become virtually obvious—such as liberty, democracy and the wishes of the people they claim to represent.”(xix). Even if some of his views will enrage some, the insight and wisdom revealed in the view shine brightly.

The title of the book, “Europe: the shattering of illusion” itself indicates clearly at the outset that Klaus' views in the book can be reasonably called “Eurosceptic”, if not “anti-European”. Indeed, what readers will read includes the most severe and penetrating criticisms of the European integration project. The views can be called “Eurosceptic” in the sense that they register strong reservation to the current European project. They also register serious skepticism to the new Euro-messianism, the idea that a new unified Europe has its own special purpose, *telo* and fate. But the phrase “anti-European” can be ambiguous and misleading and may even suggest something against Europe. In its nutshell, Klaus' misgiving about the European integration project is not against Europe, but for Europe. In substance, the book can be read as a long essay. It does not have a systematic theory of the nature, structure, and content of the concept of European integration. Instead, it focuses on a polemic discussion of the European integration project of its more 50 years in practice. The book does allow different views on the subject-matter to play against one another. Yet, it itself does not present a systematic and coherent theory of the European integration project. The book consists of five chapters: Chapter 1, “How we got there”; Chapter 2, “The inherent instability of the current interim phase”; Chapter 3, “The economic benefits of territorial integration: too much optimism?”; Chapter 4, “The pitfalls of denationalization and communication in Europe”; Chapter 5, “How do we go from here?” They are well logically organized together as a whole.

Chapter 1, “How we got there” gives a historical account of the origin, evolution, and practice of the idea of European integration. In Klaus' account, we witness how the original ideal of European integration grew from a thin youth into a heavy, overweigh illusion. Klaus recognizes that the story of the idea of Europe integration is a complicated history, situated in various historical contexts, driven by multiple

forces, and experiencing different phrases. Originally, the Europe integration project was designed only European nation states to economically open up to one another. Over half century, it has been developed now to the comprehensive integration that is geared for a unified Europe Union, akin to a European Super State. So far as institutional assembling is concerned, the institutional framework also evolved from the European Economic Community (EEC) via (The European Community (EC) to the European Union (EU) and, now, to the interim phrase, the European Monetary Union (EMU). That being said, the project of European integration has serious problems at the outset. In particular, “the basis for European integration project consisted of several very doubtful ideas.”(p.17). Above all, the idea that calls into “question of the existence of nation states in general” is problematic (ibid.). This idea “let to total obliteration of the enormous positive energy of national sentiments.” (ibid); “the founders of the idea of European integration had an outlook ... that saw only negatives in the concept of a nation state, and it is not different today.”(ibid). According to Klaus, this foundational idea of European integration project is fundamentally fallacious. A result of practicing such an idea results only in the growth of bureaucracy, not liberation and creation. Not only the energies of nation states die out under such growing bureaucracy, but the energies of individual persons run out gas under such growing bureaucracy. Europe becomes fatter, but not healthier. Therefore, Klaus suggests that much lesson can be learned from this history to improve the European integration project.

Chapter 2, “The inherent instability of the current interim phase” is more or less of case studies of the current interim phase of the European integration project. Using as example the economic failure of Greece, a member of the European Economic Community, Klaus indicates that institutional problems or instability feature the present interim phrase of the European integration project—that is, the phrase of the European Monetary Union period. The phrase is plagued with one financial crisis after another. The lesson to be learned is that “The Greek debt crisis has resulted from confusion about the nature of the European Union.”(p.81). It is a tip of iceberg that “the interim phrase of the EMU is an unstable system.” (p.85). So are various European institutions of integration that are the organizers of the project. EMU is an example at hand. EMU is an unstable system that either it has to return to the EU... or it will have to evolve smoothly into the EFU, the European Fiscal (or Financial) Union and then—sooner or later—into the final phrase: The EPU, the European Political Union.”(pp.65-66). With regard to practice, giving up state budget or sovereignty in making its own budget does not mean giving up national sovereignty, but also makes states more irresponsible. Noteworthy, on this context, Klaus constantly reminds us of the failure of communism in the former communist countries in Europe such as the Czech Republic itself, Poland, and so on, which are now member states of the European Community. Klaus’ comparison here may leave much to be desired and, even enrage some people. Yet, the valid point of this engaging comparison is that communism, super-nationalism, and centralized communitarism is not the way for Europe. A new Europeism must stay away from such doctrines; the concept of integration needs a re-examination from bottom up. Above, in a new Europe, the energies of nation-states and their responsibility must be fully emphasized,

not be marginalized and paid only lip service to. The Greek problem is the problem of the current emerging European system. That is the concern.

Chapter 3, “The economic benefits of territorial integration: too much optimism?” is the logical consequence of Chapters 1 & 2. The driving concept of the European integration project is that the bigger, the better; more opening, more beneficial and competitive. “The standard economic thinking on European economic integration” is that “creating a larger economic area, or expanding the market, is an undisputable economic benefits... opening, up, liberation, elimination of cross-border barriers of all kinds, free movements of good and services, people and money...allow...the division of labor and specialization.”(p.89). Yet, according to Klaus, we must ask some important questions here including whether the bigger, the better and what is opening up in the true sense. For example, opening up may not mean centralization and a conflation of the two may be a crucial source of many problems of European integration today. On this point, we must ask, “whether the evolution of European integration in the last 50 years was opening up the continent’s economy or whether it was closer to an administrative unification of the original entities, the nation states.”(p.90). We should be more responsive to one basic truth: “a large area (and complexity) needs more market forces and more decentralized decision-making, not the other way around.”(p.92). We should heed more than we do now the dissent voice: “the more decentralized the entity is, the better. Economic opening up to the flows of capital and trade is not the same thing as enlarging the size of an administrative entity.”(p.90). The reason that “the benefits of territorial markets expansion have reached their limits” is that “the regional market expansion of Europe was quite unnaturally accompanied by excessive control.”(p.110). In short, opening up should not be identified with centralization. The aspiration for liberation and opening up should be distinguished from the call for centralization. An opened economy should be a market based economy, not a socialist, planned economy. While Klaus does not want to argue that the smaller, the better, he does argue that the freer, the better. A European Union that can have only one approved “party line” and that does not tolerate either autonomy or difference” cannot be economically competitive and politically viable and stable. Klaus does not resist the concept of a unified Europe. What he resists is the concept of Europe without economic and political democracy and he consists nation-states to the the corner stone of a democratic Europe.

Chapter 4, “The pitfalls of denationalization and communication in Europe” continues the line of argument in Chapter 3. That is, a new Europe must fully appreciate the crucial role of nation states. According to Klaus, “The European ideology (europeism, in belief) is based on the idealistic theory of the state... that states, more precisely nation states represent evil...while the supranational, continental and global entities represent the Good, eliminate all forms of nationalist bickering once and for all. This view is obviously childish.”(p.117). Accordingly, as Klaus indicates, we must ask ourselves a crucial question, “Does the state, that we have taken over from our ancestors as specific and unique heritage, have any meaning and purpose in the present world?”(p.137). This is a social-political, and practical question as much as it is a philosophical question. It is a philosophical question

because it involves a deep question of what is the metaphysical and practical identity of European peoples. It is more social-political, as well as practical question. What is debated here is a crucial issue of political economy as much as it is a practical challenge. For Klaus, the basis for European nation states to disappear or to be put aside does not exist yet. Nation states are still cornerstones of real democracy, in the economic life as well as in social-political life. For Klaus, “it is clear that national as well as territorial loyalties are the precondition for democratic governance. It seems equally obvious that the European continent is not a space suitable for territorial or national loyalty... No nation called European exists, and no such nation ever did exist. That is why the entire concept of the ‘ever-closer Europe’ of unification, centralization, harmonization and standardization (you could call it *Gleichschaltung*) and utmost suppression of the nation state, is a wrong concept.”(p.138). For Klaus, “there are no arguments in favor of destroying the nations of Europe and replacing them with a unified super-state on the basis of ‘communitarism’. If there were such arguments, they would be arguments in favor of destruction of democracy.”(p.143).

In light of the above, not surprisingly, Chapter 5 concludes that “the way out of the present European crisis, or the solution for Europe ... is possible only through the renewal of economic and civic freedoms”; “The European Union ... as an institution can survive, only if it says good-bye to the social-engineering (and therefore utopian) vision of artificial unification of the Continent, and returns to the original concept of cooperation between sovereign member countries, which must be the cornerstone of integration, not its victim.”(pp.160-161). Klaus is not advocating nationalism to replace Europeism or pan-Europeism here, as one may think he does. Instead, he defends the supreme value of freedom. As he insists, “freedom is the key word ... Without freedom we shall never repair Europe. Therefore, if there should be a European Union, it should be one that can entertain freedom, creativity, and responsibility, not one that hinders such, that can include national diversity and sovereignty, not that is geared to eliminate such, and that is more decentralized and less bureaucratized, not the opposite. Meanwhile Klaus defends the concept that only a democratic Europe can have a bright future; and nation-states are still the cornerstones of true democracy in Europe or a true democratic Europe, and therefore still have important meanings and purposes in contemporary Europe. In sum, the entire concept of European integration needs a reconstruction. He therefore rejects those arguments of new Euro-messianism which for him are anti-democracy.

Evidentially, in the book, while questioning the general foundational assumptions and beliefs of the European integration, Klaus approaches the subject-matter mainly from the economical point of view. His argument is based mainly on analyses and discussions of the economic ramifications of those driving ideas of the European integration project. A crucial question which he raises here is also what kind of European economy the future Europe will have, a centralized one or one governed by free market? Nevertheless, Klaus’ book is philosophically substantial. Some of those questions which it poses are philosophical. For example, philosophically, Klaus’ book returns us back to some basic philosophical questions including self-identity, the role of nation-state, truth, value, and meaning. It raises questions of the relationships

between beliefs and reality, theories and practices, whole and parts as well as questions of freedom, responsibility, autonomy, sovereignty and so. With regard to social-political philosophy, Klaus' view raises some interesting questions of what kind of constitutional democracy that Europe should have, one of centralization or one of solidarity with diversity? What should a modern, enlightened Europe be? That is the question! What should and will European nation states become? That is the question!

Klaus' views in *Europe: The Shattering of Illusion* put him severely at odds with those preeminent European thinkers including the celebrated German philosopher Jürgen Hagerman and the late French philosopher Jacques Derrida. These preeminent European thinkers—Hagerman and among others—harbor ultimate confidence that a full-pledged unified European Community, if not a European State, is not only the hope of Europe, but also the hope of the world. Habermas, the author of the famous concept of “post-nation” democracy, agrees that the present European integration project is faltering. But for Habermas, the fault is not with the European integration project itself, but with practices. As it is evident, Klaus would reject the concept of “post-nation” democracy. Habermas is a staunch believer and defender of unified European values. Klaus insists value diversity among European nation states. Habermas strongly believes that the object of new European patriotism should be the new European constitution, that is, European “constitutional patriotism”. For Klaus, only nation states can be the object of patriotism of their citizens. Habermas would like to distinguish *demos* and *ethos*. Klaus wants to unite both.

In sum, Klaus' *Europe: The Shattering of Illusion* is akin to a bottle of good wine, bears costly insight and requires careful tasting. What it presents is not merely a dissenting voice to the present European integration project, but an alternative view of what Europe is and ought to be.

Dr. BARBARA ENTL, St. George's University School of Medicine.