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## The End of the European Ideal?



The European Union's predecessor was born out of the lessons learned from World War II. It gave rise to the slogan “No more war”, which for decades has set a firmly established path to peace. There was another – equally important – element of the European project, however. It signaled to Western European societies that their historic struggles were over. An ideal that has been cherished for centuries, European unity, seemed to be taking shape. This is the highest form of politics, when ideals are realized. So this was not just a new start.

It was a revolutionary change, an attempt to transcend history, and even a whole new way of organizing society. We cannot say that the experiment was unsuccessful. Even with the Cold War as a backdrop, Europe remained at peace for many decades, and Westerners lived comfortably in welfare states. But what was the undoubted historic novelty and merit of the new project was also its limitation.

Firstly, the Soviet Union was left out; the unity of Europe was a "semi-unity". Secondly, Central and Eastern European citizen's wellbeing lagged significantly behind Western Europeans. They lacked not just freedom, but the sense of wellbeing as well. The end of the Cold War was in fact a *second attempt* to make right what was amiss. For a long time it seemed that the attempt would succeed, and that the whole of Europe would now become what the West had become after 1945.

It is unfortunate that we enter 2025 with this second attempt having failed. Europe is not completely unified today, moreover Russian-Ukrainian war made the peace project seemingly impossible. Even on the level of ideas the attempt was unsuccessful. Since neither peace nor wellbeing was achieved, Central and Eastern European citizens are no more aware of what the idea of European unity means to them than they were in the past.



But the biggest problem is that with the end of welfare states and an uncertain geopolitical situation, even Western Europeans are not sure about it anymore. In a globalized world it is practically impossible to find ideals similar to the post-1945 narrative. But if not ideals, what will shape the future of Europe?