

### 30.3.2016 Brussels. The massacre of the innocents

That spring morning, Brussels plunged into chaos. Paris had experienced two massacres last year, against Charlie Hebdo in January and in the Bataclan district in November. These dozens of innocents strewn on the ground bear witness to the horror of the terrorism that finds its roots in Syria and Iraq but which recruits its kamikaze soldiers in the *banlieues* of Brussels and Paris. How far can this go?

These terrorist groups choose to sacrifice their lives to strike the society in which they grew up and where they have chosen to kill themselves. It is hard to imagine how whole groups of young people can fall into such nihilism, into such collective paranoia. They are of the same generation, without an older mentor, in contrast to the popular image of a *deus ex machina* in the person of the imam from the local mosque. They have grown up together, with frequent pairs of siblings bonded by their childhood experiences, long before they were snatched by jihadism and its dark designs. The idea that at least thirty young people, maybe more, from the same Brussels district could fall into collective horror in this way is a terrible conundrum for the society that has now to fight them and prevent them from doing harm. No one really understands the mechanisms of their radicalisation. And we are transfixed with anxiety: what if, after Brussels and Paris, London, Rome, Berlin, Athens and all the European cities were to become the scene of new massacres in turn?

The police response is obviously inadequate. The people who committed the suicide attacks in Paris came from the same terrorist group based in the inner-city area of Brussels. How could they still be at large four months later, preparing their second round of attacks without hindrance, all the while offering a hideout for several months to one of their number who had all the police forces in Europe at his heels? "National police forces", whether Belgian, French or anything else, carry out their business without any overall vision of a phenomenon which is not Belgian, or French, but European. Their "Maginot line" has been breached. They have been overtaken by events, and we are still paying a high price for the refusal of the States to create effective European institutions for policing and justice in the name of a "national sovereignty" that no longer means anything in 21st century Europe.

No internal borders within Europe will contain this terrorism. In the populist anti-European declarations we are reaching the heights of absurdity to justify a return to nation states, calling for everything from the end of the euro to the end of the Schengen area. As if a national border could prevent someone from travelling from Brussels to Paris in the midst of the uninterrupted stream of travellers who make that journey every day! On the other hand, the failure to organise European cooperation is very clearly responsible for the appalling inefficiency of the police forces in tracking the jihadists who are in thrall to the Islamic State that trained and supplied them, including physically, and which controls and exploits their suicide attacks.

No doubt it is possible to stop all that, but when, and how? And how many more massacres will there be before? This assumes firstly that Islamic State will lose the war

in the Middle East. Lose it on the ground, but also lose the war for hearts and minds as Nazism did in 1945, not least among the German people. This is the big question for the alliances forming against Daesh, “recycling” a ruler like Bashar al-Assad who has done so much to throw entire Syrian populations into the arms of the Islamists. But no doubt he has to be taken into account given that, with his army and despite his crimes against humanity, he retains the confidence of part of the international community and of the Shi’ite people in Syria.

Then, we need to be able to hope for a future for the population who, as in Molenbeek, are at risk of contamination by religious and terrorist radicalisation. Their malaise can generate hatred of the society where they grew up, and turn them towards Daesh. Those who have been radicalised must be fought. It is not with our blinkered national police and criminal justice systems that we will succeed in doing so effectively. Those who could be radicalised must be prevented. We will certainly not do so with hatred and stigmatisation.

Europe is facing difficult times. It is through solidarity and and by following the path of reason that it will overcome them.