

## CONTEMPLATING THE WORST...

...**S**o that it never happens. Admittedly, it sounds a bit like witchcraft. Nonetheless, I have maintained this habit since childhood. Overall, I can say that luck has mostly remained faithful to me, as if I could ward off misfortune through its mental anticipation. It only became truly dangerous when overconfidence and carelessness gained the upper hand.

The turn of the year provides an opportunity to weed and plough through the garden of scenarios once again. Many things are familiar and must be left standing: national debt, higher interest rates, the sustainability of interest burdens, the decay of infrastructure, the loss of defence capability, the unwillingness of the younger generation to work, exaggerated expectations of the collective, and the recurring spectre of inflation – all admittedly terrible. But only relatively so.

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The worst thing I can currently imagine is a gradual defeat of the Ukrainians in their stand against the Russian invaders and the termination of America's transatlantic defence of Europe after the next presidential election. What would this mean?

First, Europe would have to draw (even) closer together. Under external pressure, the ideas of subsidiarity and decentralisation would face even greater challenges than is currently the case. The need for rapid rearmament would seal the step toward fiscal union; the (high!) debt of most EU member countries would be definitively mutualised.

Second, in many European countries, the previously somewhat concealed pro-Russian forces on both the left and the right would put pressure on the moderates to move towards a policy of reconciliation with President Vladimir Putin. This option is already looming in the background due to the vital necessity of gas deliveries from Russia.

Third, Russia might be tempted to annex the Baltic states, as it did Crimea ten years ago, or to install an openly pro-Russia government in Serbia, which would have implications for other governments in European countries, especially those that are already less reliable.

Fourth, the mental and intellectual degeneration in Europe would have spread so far that decisions and actions in politics and economics would no longer be determined by the Western triad of Jerusalem (Christianity), Athens (Philosophy), and Rome (Law), but by an inexplicable inclination towards authoritarian systems and leaders.

Meanwhile, fifth, inflation and record-high interest rates would prevail, and the European economy would have definitively decoupled from the world economy.

The so-called unimaginable at the end of the year. In hopes that it never comes to pass.

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KH, 31.12.2023

