
Interview: Georgios N. Anastassopoulos

'We have been overtaken by events'

Mr. Anastassopoulos, who is from Greece, is the vice president of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. He was interviewed by Angelika Beyreuther-Raimondi at the Pan-European Transport Conference in Prague.

EIR: In your speech, you mentioned that there has been a lot of talk, but nothing has been done so far with respect to the development of the central and eastern European nations since 1989.

Anastassopoulos: We have been so overtaken by events that it took us time to become conscious of them, and to start reacting. It took us time to organize some assistance, and there should be much more. I think we are going to improve, but I am not certain that we are going to improve with the speed required, in view of the changes in the countries of central and eastern Europe. They are passing through a very difficult period, and unfortunately, this period will not be short. If people, at least some of them, thought that they would have a better time almost overnight, they must have been disappointed. They must realize that the passage from centrally planned economies to the market economy, something which has never been done before, is a very difficult one, and it does necessarily imply a very hard period of transition.

You can't speak about transport, if you don't place it in the general context of relations. . . . You have to see where we are and where we are going.

EIR: There are two competing concepts at work here. One is to promote real increases in productivity and infrastructure. I just spoke with a member of the Russian delegation, and they have some really big ideas about how to connect their huge continent to Europe [see accompanying interview with V.V. Yefimov]. And the other one, to simplify it, is the monetarist approach, the International Monetary Fund approach, which means no promotion of real industrial devel-

opment in these countries.

Anastassopoulos: I do not think that it can be proved which is the more valid. You can't imagine any country staying well-placed in the race of economic competition—which we are all in, whether we like it or not, we can't abstain—if it has not put its house in order. That is a prerequisite. The problem is, naturally, that the measures that help you to bring your house or your economy into order, do not in themselves promote economic growth. That is well known. On the contrary, in order to fight inflation, sometimes you have to go for a recession. But, but—there is a "but"! In order to create sane conditions for economic growth, you have to have your economy in order, but it is a phase through which you have to pass.

Without that, you cannot push for economic growth. It's as simple as that. If you want to tell me that a good economic policy is one that does not bother very much about inflation, taxes, etc. . . . you can't follow such a policy for a number of years, because there will come a time when you have to stop it. . . . This kind of policy you can have only as a temporary policy, for a certain period—talking about the two schools you were referring to.

I think that unfortunately, a government of a country must—whether it likes it or not, because of the negative repercussions on economic growth—put the economy in order, otherwise they cannot continue. . . .

But what you said before about splendid ideas: Fortunately, ideas are not lacking. What proves a bit more difficult in practice, is to try to seek ways in which you can have the means at your disposal, so that you can put some of these bright ideas into practice.

And that is the big question of politics, otherwise you come up with ideas—I can give you visions, I always say, and I believe in that, that a politician without vision should not stay in politics. But a politician who does confuse his vision with reality should not have a place in politics. You have to have a vision to get you moving—

EIR: Not many politicians in Europe have vision.

Anastassopoulos: They should have vision. What are you trying to do in life . . . how do you feel in the day-to-day problems, not only in material things which are important, but questions like dignity? If you don't have a vision about



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the role of the state, how liberal it should be, etc., about dignity, social justice. . . .

EIR: This conference attracted us, because concrete ideas and vision for Europe are being discussed. How should Europe function in the next months and years? Looking at the East, I find it very urgent to increase production, get infrastructure. Looking at the South, it's even more important. And looking at the West—I am not a friend of the current system of American economics. Poverty is spreading in the U.S.; it's a disaster. In Europe we should have a vision of how to change that misery.

Anastassopoulos: Even more: This is one of the cases, where having a vision is also promoting one's interests, and that is also very important. . . . You should have people [in eastern and central Europe] who are being inspired and influenced by what they have been doing. They have chased regimes away . . . and now they are trying to follow our example, and then they find that great resistance. We have a great moral and political commitment to fulfill.

But apart from that, when these people, after going through very difficult phases in the next years, when they get

again to the point of economic development, they represent potential consumers or producers. . . .

[Unlike the countries of eastern Europe], Germany has both the economic power to [solve its economic problems] without asking for anyone else's help to do it, and, of course, there is also another big difference: The people have a sense of duty and discipline and of organization. So they are doing it. You can't expect really the same degree of solidarity between western and eastern Europeans.

EIR: Why not? Politicians also have the task of educating the people.

Anastassopoulos: They belong to the same continent, but not to the same people as the Germans. The Community as a whole is economically not as strong as Germany alone is. I believe there is also a difference in the way you can stimulate growth. The average eastern German was generally well educated; the structure was better there, even though the material conditions were as bad as here [in Czechoslovakia]. But the human infrastructure was better prepared to be mobilized, and still, it will take some time for the west Germans to mobilize their eastern compatriots. . . .

A call for swift action on ties with east Europe

The following report was submitted by Mr. Anastassopoulos in summary of the conference panel on relations with central and eastern Europe.

The radical political changes in the states of central and eastern Europe may be expected to bring about more intensive cooperation between these states and the European Community and their gradual inclusion in the process of European integration; because of this, considerably more political attention needs to be paid to transport, to reflect its real importance for the process of European integration.

On the other hand, it is time to breathe life into the clauses on cooperation in the field of transport contained in the agreements between the European Community and Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Soviet Union on trade and economic cooperation and proceed to an exchange of views on future developments of a European transport system.

For the European Parliament, priority should be given to the rapid conclusion of agreements, particularly on the following transport policy questions:

- definition of certain European high-speed rail links

complemented by high-grade intercity train connections, while respecting the countryside and the people involved;

- definition of a European network for road/rail/inland waterway and combined transport with adequate terminals;

- definition of the technical specifications for a uniform European air traffic control system with an appropriate number of control centers;

- definition of an alternative transit route from Greece to central Germany via Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia;

- cooperation between railway companies in the commercial field, in order to guarantee competitiveness of goods transport by rail on central and eastern European routes;

- development of cross-border links and sufficient border checkpoints between the Community and central and eastern European countries;

- reciprocal access to inland waterways, the importance of which should be stressed with regard to the forthcoming completion of the Rhine-Danube Canal;

- overflying rights and freedom of commercial activity for airlines;

- free access to loading and removal of unfair competition practices in maritime transport; considerable support should be given to coastal shipping, not least as an environmentally compatible alternative to transport by land.