

EUROPE 2040: FIVE SCENARIOS

These scenarios were developed for the Civitates Forum 2026. They are meant to inspire and spark debate and do not reflect Civitates' official position.

1. BIG PEACE

Climate Change: Reversed

Europe: EU-Light

USA: Transatlantic Partnership

Russia: Isolationism

AI: Liberation

State: Freedom

Participation: Increased

Europe breathes easier. Climate change has been largely reversed, transparent solar panels, tidal generators, and advanced biofuels power the European net-zero economy. Consumption is mindful, guided by ideals of circularity. A revitalised transatlantic partnership fosters innovation, while a demographically troubled Russia has turned inward. The era is dubbed BIG PEACE. The EU thrives as a 'confederation of nations', unified on defense, migration and climate, yet celebrating cultural and political diversity. A Euro-AI is provided as a state service to all citizens; it's a non-commercial tool that keeps users' data safe from companies and government. Advances in technology have led to reduced workweeks and universal basic income, still there is no shortage of meaningful labour due to demographic change. Carework is highly paid and valued. Digital democracy flourishes, empowering citizens through new forms of direct participation.

2. BOOMING FORTRESS

Climate Change: Gradual

Europe: Integration

USA: Enemy

Russia: Expansion

AI: Just a tool

State: Freedom

Participation: Increased

Europe swelters. Heatwaves and floods are commonplace, driving massive state and private investment in green technology. A 'Green Boom' sparks innovation – carbon capture, resilient infrastructure, alternative energy – but the cost is immense. Abandoned by an increasingly authoritarian US and threatened by an expansionist Russia, Europe stands alone. Borders are fortified, immigration is strictly controlled and limited to a 'blue card' talent programme. European political integration has deepened: Europe has its own army now. Many decisions are made by technocrats (assisted by European-built AI). Yet, within this BOOMING FORTRESS, liberal values – rule of law, privacy, civil rights – are upheld. Participation and elections are alive, at least on local levels. Europe has become a fortress but refuses to compromise on its core principles.

3. EMERGENCY RULE

Climate Change: Disruptive

Europe: Integration

USA: Enemy

Russia: Expansion

AI: Oppressive

State: Control

Participation: Reduced

An eerie calm hangs over the fully integrated European Federation. Under the perpetual EMERGENCY RULE, a response to disruptive climate chaos and external threats, the state's control is absolute. An oppressive, pan-European AI is the key instrument of this control, managing daily life from energy rations to information access (which is heavily censored). Threatened by an expansionist Russia and a hostile Christian nationalist USA, the European Federation has both unified and turned inward. Decisions are taken by unelected

emergency managers. Democratic participation has been paused for security reasons. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are suspended, anti-patriotic statements are punishable. The internet is state-controlled and fenced in by the Great Firewall of Europe. Much economic activity has shifted towards food, energy and arms production. Europe is unified and stable, but it has traded its freedoms for a heavily monitored security. The underground is buzzing.

4. COMPETITIVE NATIONALISM

Climate Change: Disruptive

Europe: Fragmentation

USA: Ally

Russia: Expansion

AI: Oppressive

State: Control

Participation: Reduced

The European Union is no more. The continent has broken up into competing nation states, many of them ruled by hard-right, ultra-nationalist governments. Money from the solidly Christian nationalist U.S., but also from China and Russia have fueled Europe's break-up. Most European nations invest heavily in defense and self-sufficiency, treat dissent as subversive, and limit freedom of speech and civic participation. This curtailing of civic liberties is justified by the need to fence off climate migration from the South. Border controls and heavy policing have made international mobility difficult. Diplomacy and bureaucracy thrive. Russia has formulated a new "Warsaw Doctrine" and asserts its influence over much of Eastern Europe. AI tools from the U.S. and China dominate all over Europe.

5. NEW MIDDLE AGES

Climate Change: Disruptive

Europe: Fragmentation

USA: Civil War

Russia: Break-Up

AI: Oppressive

State: Control

Participation: Reduced

The dream of a united Europe is gone. The continent and its nations have fragmented into a patchwork of competing city-states, a NEW MIDDLE AGES born from climate collapse and digital decay. Walled enclaves, ruled by tech-oligarchies, employ algorithmic surveillance tools to enforce control over scarce resources and a weary, disconnected populace. With the U.S. consumed by civil war and Russia being divided between China and India, there are no dominating superpowers left. Life in Europe is a hyperlocal struggle for survival, dictated by brutal inequality and competing autocrats. Democratic participation survives in local communities. The threat of physical violence has returned to everyday life in Europe.

*** POTEMKIN DEMOCRACY**

Climate Change: Gradual

Europe: EU light

USA: Ally

Russia: Expansion

AI: Oppressive

State: State Inc.

Participation: Data-Only

Most European nations are run like companies, governance follows market logic, and entrepreneurs are politicians. Democratic participation has been replaced by a 'data-based' democracy: Citizens 'vote' with every online click, purchase, and location ping. This firehose of data is processed by AI tools which are often owned by the ruling entrepreneurs. The state uses AI to nudge citizens' behavior to align with state-corporate objectives. The structures of democracy still exist - elections, parliaments - but as a facade, a Potemkin village where real decisions have been made by board rooms and algorithms.