

# 'Air piracy' – or air hypocrisy?

*CIB chairman Edward Spalton considers the EU's reaction to Belarus's recent forced diversion of a commercial flight, and how it reflects a naive and hypocritical approach by the EU and its American allies to the geopolitics of the former Soviet Union.*

I first thought of entitling this article 'Pot calls kettle black', but decided that delicate souls might think that was racist. I then thought of 'Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander', but other easily offended people might believe that was sexist.

My inspiration was the recent address to the European parliament by **President Charles Michel** concerning the recent forced diversion of a commercial flight by the forces of Belarus. He began:

*'Hijacking a plane is piracy. With 171 passengers on board, it is kidnapping. When these acts are carried out by the state, it's hostage taking and state piracy. For what? To get hold of a young journalist and his partner, whose free speech is intolerable for Mr Lukashenko. We had to react quickly. And strongly. And we did. We quickly agreed to adopt sanctions against the Belarusian regime commensurate with the gravity of the event.'*

*'These include additional individual sanctions, targeted economic measures and a ban on Belarusian airlines. We also called on European airlines to avoid Belarusian airspace, a recommendation that was immediately followed. In the wake of this decision, the UK and US took similar measures.'*

I think we can all agree that it is undesirable that commercial flights about their lawful business should be subject to such arbitrary, unilateral disruption.

**But just look back a few years to July 2013.** President Evo Morales of Bolivia was en route from Russia when his plane was forced to land in Austria – because the CIA thought that the whistleblower Edward Snowden might be on board, and they wanted to interrogate him. Now, diverting a commercial flight is one thing – regrettable no doubt – but interrupting the flight of a head of state, who is due the highest protection of diplomatic immunity in the civilised conventions of conduct between sovereign states, is something on a completely higher scale of thuggishness.

At the time **Jen Psaki**, spokesperson for the US State Department, admitted that the US, ‘had been in contact with a range of countries across the world who had a chance of having Snowden land or even transit through their countries.’ So Morales’ plane was forced to land.

**Fast forward to 2021, and the same Jen Psaki is President Joe Biden’s press secretary.** She says that the action by Belarus is ‘a brazen affront to international peace and security.’ Doubtlessly so. But apparently it wasn’t so when the same thing (and arguably much worse) was done under the orders of the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.

I think we can take the manufactured outrage – from the EU, the USA and almost certainly from our own tousle-headed, would-be Churchillian Prime Minister – with a fairly large pinch of salt. He will, of course, wish to oblige President Biden sufficiently to receive a pat on the head and a confirmation that we still enjoy a ‘special relationship’ with the USA, perhaps leading to a satisfactory trade agreement in due course, as long as we continue compliant.

## The Ukrainian blunder

The EU and the USA are giving Belarus much the same treatment which they gave to Ukraine to bring it 'closer to the EU both politically and economically'. Between 2011 and 2013, the EU poured some 389 million euros into the process of destabilisation via multiple NGOs and front organisations, ostensibly devoted to civil rights. German political foundations, like the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, poured in money for years, grooming their own preferred candidates as the future puppet rulers when the great day dawned.

At the time of the putsch against the elected Ukrainian government in 2014, Victoria Nuland of the US State Department boasted that the United States had spent 5 billion dollars on the same project. Rabbis advised Jews to flee Kiev, as Nazi militias were taking over security and police functions.

Writing in Conservative Home of 12 March 2014, Bill Cash MP, Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee, took a very balanced, common sense view:

*'We do not have to be enthusiastic advocates of Vladimir Putin's policies to recognise that this entire Ukrainian crisis was avoidable. Not to recognise that the Crimea – handed over by Khrushchev within the Soviet Union to Ukraine in 1954 – has been and remains a vital national security and defence interest for Russia, including the Black Sea and its fleet for centuries. The European Union's Eastern Partnership and Association Agreement were clearly anticipated to be Ukraine's stepping stone to membership of the European Union, and probably of NATO as well. On both counts the EU has pursued a remarkably naive foreign policy.'*

*'There has undoubtedly been fault on both sides and the best thing is to be realistic. Ukraine itself is said to be*

*in such financial turmoil that it would require a bailout of something of the order of £35 billion over the next two years – much of which would presumably fall on the British taxpayer. But the original fault lies with the EU and the way in which it has gone about all this.'*

## **'Wider still and wider...'**

We only sing 'Land of Hope and Glory' in self-mockery these days, but the EU still believes in its own perpetual expansion. Known as the *Drang nach Osten* (push to the East), it was long a feature of German foreign policy and had been so for many years when the Kaiser's Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg formalised it as Germany's war aim on 9 September 1914:

*'Russia must be thrust back as far as possible from Germany's eastern frontier and her domination over non-Russian vassal peoples broken... We must create a central European economic association through common customs treaties to include France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Austria-Hungary, Poland and perhaps Italy, Sweden and Norway... All its members will be formally equal but in practice be under German leadership...'*

It sounds a bit familiar, doesn't it?

Around the same time that the USA and EU powers were forcing down President Morales' plane in July 2013, David Cameron was visiting Kazakhstan, where he told his hosts that he looked forward to the day when the European Union stretched 'from the Atlantic to the Urals'. But it appeared he had not consulted Mr Putin about that first! Oddly enough, that was a phrase used by the Nazis in the early Forties as they schemed for what they called their 'European Economic Community' – a term which also sounds familiar!

Fortunately, it looks as if geography, self-interest and common sense may be drawing this chapter towards its close. In spite of strong American pressure, Germany has insisted on completing the Nord Stream II gas pipeline from Russia. This bypasses the route through Ukraine and should assure a reliable supply of gas, cutting out a sometimes unreliable 'middle man'. Germany and Europe need the gas and Russia needs the money. So there is every incentive to neutralise the tensions in Ukraine and give its inhabitants a chance to settle down peacefully without interference from the outside.

America is focusing its concerns on China and may increasingly see Europe as a second order priority. If Eastern Europe can be stabilised and protected from EU expansionism and fear of Russian retaliation, then that is one worry the less for everybody.