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“What Europe Has Done for Competition”

Johny Munkhammar, the author of this interesting paper, has done a lot to elucidate what competition has given to Europe. In view of this, one might naturally wonder “And what has Europe done for competition?” The answer to this question is just as compelling as the paper. Indeed, the history of this continent is brimming with excellent examples of European attempts to resist competition. Historically, in Europe, competition had sometimes been confused with confrontation, and aggressive political and economic foreign policies did much damage to the notion of fair and well regulated competition.

From this perspective, the Industrial Revolution played a definitive role in challenging the forces that suppressed the freedom to compete (for the revolution does, in essence, challenge the status quo). The Industrial Revolution liberated the people's desire to embrace innovation and provided them with increased opportunities to implement their ideas into practice. Industrial expansion curbed state interventionism and ensured that Europe became the economic leader of the world.

Nonetheless, in truth, the subsequent establishment of the Common Market or the EEC, with six and later fifteen member states, has significantly reduced competition in Europe. The tendency to safeguard a particular state's economy by means of interventionism and over-regulation, as well as an outdated belief that European superiority is to last forever, has led to economic stagnation and compromised the people's very desire to compete. Believing themselves to be the natural champions in the world, the Europeans had lost their competitive drive and began to expect to win the economic race without actually trying. This stance has proved to be extremely dangerous in the era of globalisation which saw the sleeping tigers of the East rise and successfully compete with Europe, using our own innovative tools and borrowing European methods, which had been already borrowed and improved by our brothers and friends from the United States of America.

Competition is not just an abstract ideology or a dogma: first and foremost it is a part of human nature. The affluent, relaxed Europeans devoted themselves to different, more spectacular competitions, leaving economic aspects of competition to others. The Europeans have embraced sport, especially football, as well as other mass social and cultural contests, sublimating their natural competitive spirit in these distractions. The results are evident: at present, largest European nations battle over trophies in the soccer championships, while their economies are deep in stagnation.

The Europeans eventually renounced this sort of denial of the economic reality, but not as a result of external pressures. It was their fellow Europeans, recently invited to join the European Union that opened their eyes. The new members came from ten ex-communist countries, bringing with them enormous competitive drive, which they had been quietly accruing for dozens of years. This ardent desire for innovation, a desire to achieve ensured that Polish plumbers, Czech dentists, Lithuanian nurses have arrived at their neighbours' doorstep, offering services and goods at a competitive price, sometimes many times lower than that of their western European business counterparts. Most of the established EU members have prudently closed their own markets against intruders, in visible and more often, invisible ways. Some, like UK and Ireland, were brave enough to welcome internal competition. We did not have to wait too long for the results: the UK and Irish economies are booming now, whereas those of other member states are still facing an uncertain future, as their

leaders hold on to the bygone days of European economic supremacy. Let us hope that President Sarkozy's question is just a invitation to the discussion and not the attempt to pull out France and EU from globalization process.

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