

# COMMENTARY

## EUROPEAN UNION – WHAT KIND OF EU DO WE WANT

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### ABSTRACT

*In current days, we often hear that the EU is in crisis and needs reform, otherwise this project that has successfully kept peace in Europe for more than 60 years could, in the short or long term, end its existence. I agree that the EU needs reform. But what kind of a reform? What kind of a reform do we want? Actually, a better question would be: what kind of EU do we want? Without a concrete future vision of the EU, all our steps could be useless.*

## REFLECTION ABOUT THE PRESENT FORM OF EU

The current crisis of the EU is neither just about the unsustainable public debt and the paralyzed economic growth from the economic point of view, nor about the social crisis regarding the insufficiently managed refugee influx. It is a crisis of our values. When people lose their values, they also lose their human faces and stop to be a human being. The same could happen with the EU. When the EU loses its values, the peace and our quality of life will be undoubtedly endangered.

What are the values of the European Union? According to the official website of the EU: „Respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.” While we nowadays often encounter rising inequalities, politicians who do not listen to their citizens, or rules that are abused in many cases without corresponding sanctions, we act but often without thinking about the reason of these actions. In this way, we focus the future of the EU and our main attention only on economic prosperity and a way of life which is often based only on materialism and the consumption of goods and services; the anthropocentrism and individualism that have transformed into egoism, and we do not take into consideration the needs and interests of the others. The last time, when the individualist uncoordinated state politics dominated in Europe, was in the thirties, when it led to the largest conflict of mankind that had ever taken place before. No one in Europe wants to repeat again this kind of failure of diplomacy and dialogue, and we can be sure that all EU member states with its citizens surely prefer to live in peace, harmony and prosperity.

## THE RISE OF NATIONALISM

The age before World War II was also characterized by the rise of nationalism, similarly to that we can encounter in Europe today. The EU's aims are different; the integration is not about to be all culturally equal European citizens with a single cultural background. One of the EU's symbols, the motto, claims exactly the opposite: "United in diversity". Nowadays, we should be able to make a clear distinction between patriotism and nationalism. While the first term means devoted love, support and defence of one's country, national loyalty and conservation of our unique cultural heritage; the other term expresses the policy of asserting the interests of one nation, viewed as separate from the interests of other nations or the common interests of all nations - basically the superiority of one's nation's interests in comparison with the others. We can learn from the history that the second approach based on the egoistic deviation of the core eternal EU values did not have positive consequences when it had been put in practice. Meanwhile, the respect for other nations and legitimate countries' interests and the mutual cooperation between nations have achieved peace and stability in Europe for more than 60 years, something that Europe had not ever known during the history of mankind. It is very important today to look to the past, to be able to learn from it and build a better future as Edmund Burke said: "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it," and as Thomas Mann argued: "Who doesn't know the past, will not understand the future."

### BACK TO THE ROOTS

Therefore, to define a future vision of the EU, it is crucial to look to the past, especially to the beginnings of the European integration. The values and pillars the European Economic Communities have been established upon are the followings: reason for justice and

freedom, solidarity, strenuousness, the spirit of initiative, love to the family, anthropocentrism, dignity of the human being, respect for life, tolerance, desire for development, trust, cooperation and peace, openness to the world and openness to the future. The idea of solidarity consists in the fact that each of us is a unique part of the community and it also supposes that each of us can share the success and failure with the others, according to the Pope Francis who said “solidarity is when one suffers, all suffer.” When politicians and EU citizens share these values and implement them through their policies, the EU will stand firmly and will get stronger than ever before.

#### ECONOMY – THE CRISIS OF RULES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Eurozone crisis stemming from the unsustainably high public debts has its causes in the insufficient implementation of common fiscal rules codified in the European Fiscal Compact from 2012 and the previous Stability and Growth pact from 1998. The rescuing of banks by the capitalisation with state resources and the expansive monetary policy of the quantitative easing of European Central Bank with the lowest interest rates in the history made the economy of the EU member states even more unstable and more vulnerable to a possible financial crisis. If the EU had stood firmly on its values such as the proclaimed rule of law and conserved also one of the fundamental principles of international law, *pacta sunt servanda*, it would be less probable that the public debts will exceed the determined level. Or, if the Schengen member states had protected their borders of the Schengen Area as they had committed in the treaties, even though it is an uneasy task (especially for sea states) and it requires many and effectively allocated material and personal resources, the European migration

crisis would not have so serious consequences and would have been easier to tackle.

## MIGRATION – THE CRISIS OF SOLIDARITY AND DIGNITY

Regarding the migration crisis, we could observe in past days the proposal of the current Maltese presidency: for a migrant who is refused to be reallocated by an EU member state, this state should pay the price of 60 000 €. Giving prices and evaluating the life of the human beings by money means a very big step back and an abuse towards one of the core EU values – dignity. Of course, based on solidarity, all the member states should act in this field in order to solve this crisis. However, we are not the same, each country has its own comparative advantage, and therefore each country can be more effective in contributing to the management of crisis by its own means. Those countries with significant experience in integrating migrants may continue filling this role, while those which have enough personal and material resources may contribute to the search and rescue operations, protect the borders of the Schengen Area or establish hot spots for people in need and so on.

## TERRORISM – THE CRISIS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTEGRATION

If we maintain and put into practice the values we proudly claim (but, as we know, we do not follow), Europe would be less probably the target of so many terrorist attacks which were often executed

by unintegrated radicals from segregated communities. These people usually understand their deeds as a fight against our perceived values, which are, in fact, not our real values, but the results of their bad implementation. Actually, our real proclaimed values are in many cases almost perfectly compatible with their religious ideology. And again, this could be tackled as the result of the EU's strategy of inclusive growth and minorities' integration into a real multicultural society, where everybody respects the values, the culture and the rights of the others and feel free to say: "Yes, I am a Muslim, I am a Hindu and I am a Christian" (David Cameron).

#### AGRICULTURE – CRISIS OF FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY

Another controversial issue in which the principle of fair and equal approach has suffered is the issue of the agriculture and food production industry of the EU member states which joined the EU in 2004. Why did we not get the same conditions to cultivate and produce our agriculture products if we claim to build a single market with equal conditions for everybody? Portuguese or Slovak producers also need a comparable level of subsidies like their Dutch or German colleagues in order to avoid the effects of market imperfections and be able to produce at competitive prices while still being able to maintain their businesses. Why should the V4 countries' market tolerate lower qualities of food products than Western Europe?

#### POLITICIANS – CRISIS OF DIALOGUE AND COMMUNICATION

Democratically elected politicians are elected in this way because their voters suppose that they will defend their interests. But how do they know the interests and standpoints of their citizens regarding EU matters, if they do not communicate on a regular basis, do not enhance the dialogue and do not implement what their citizens really want? The politicians should therefore listen to their citizens, as they are elected from them, by them and for them. It is their responsibility, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, to bring only those areas to the EU level which are tackled better there than on the state level (e. g. digital and energy market, traffic or education). If these politicians are not willing to lead open dialogues, their citizens should be able to make them listen and communicate.

#### A BETTER TOMORROW – BASED ON EDUCATION AND OUR FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Of course, in order to be able to communicate to the leaders what kinds of improvements do we want in Europe, we as citizens should have enough knowledge of the EU policy areas and should be aware how the system works. Therefore, the support of education and maybe the idea of harmonized education systems are of key importance. As John Fitzgerald Kennedy said: “Education without freedom is useless, but freedom without education is dangerous.” Education, freedom and peace are privileges our fathers and grandfathers fought for throughout the history. Our responsibility and obligation today is to appreciate their struggle. The best way we can do it is to live with our freedom and human rights, making the world a better place for living.

Freedom basically means responsibility. Every one of us is responsible for his/her own deeds. It is only upon us what kind of a

future we will nurture. The history and recent events show us what could happen when states and citizens act on their own, promoting only their interests without taking the others into consideration, and do not fulfil their obligations. However, the past events have also shown us what we could achieve when we act together, communicate, coordinate our policies and maintain the common values. I think more than 60 years of peace and prosperity is enough to help us to choose the right way. “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing” (Edmund Burke). The future of the EU is only upon us. How will WE decide? *“As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it.” (Saint-Exupéry).*