

*Make Your Choice: Liberal Visions for
Europe*



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FOREWORD

Dear reader,

The fact that you are holding this book in your hands shows that 2019 really is the year of debating the future of the European Union. Not just ahead of the European Parliament elections in May, but especially since the elections. Because one thing is certain: the political landscape in Europe is changing and we are already seeing a shift of power in the European Parliament. For the first time in the history of the house, the conservative and the social democratic groups can't rule alone. A democratic majority depends on the third biggest force: the liberal group.

Much has been said on the campaign trails all over Europe with the strong narrative of fighting populism, creating a "now or never" sense that democrats must stand up to defend our liberal European democracy. The historical increase in voter turnout was a clear sign that said messages touched many.

As the European Liberal Youth, we joined the broad range of not only political parties, but many actors in society like non-profit organisations, corporations and celebrities bringing attention towards participating in the elections. As the European umbrella organisation of national youth organisations inside and outside the European Union, representing around 200 000 young liberals, we were

especially happy to see young people increasingly showing up at the ballot boxes.

Because after all, we strongly believe that young people need a voice and they have made themselves heard. That is why I am even more delighted to see that in the liberal Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, 18 out of 108 Members are under 35 years old. Liberal parties are strongly showing that giving young people a voice is more to them than just empty words in speeches. I myself had the honour to get elected in Germany to the European Parliament and am now able to work with many dedicated colleagues for a more youthful future from inside the parliament.

But I and all the other new lawmakers are asking ourselves one question: What shall our guidelines be? After all the campaign scenarios of defending Europe's future, it is too easy to get lost in the everyday business and technical details of the work in parliament. Therefore, the European Liberal Youth and the European Liberal Forum have called on young liberals from all over Europe to express their vision for the future of the European Union in an essay. Essayists had the opportunity to present their ideas in July in Sarajevo. 11 of the essays are collected in this publication. This book is both an opportunity for young people to share their ideas and make their voices heard and an inspiration about what the future of Europe could look like.

The motto of the European Union, “United in Diversity”, still proves to be the binding element for the diverse challenges ahead of us. The need for democratic reforms has become more evident in the formally correct nomination process of new Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. A process that to many still felt undemocratic since the Spitzenkandidat principle was overthrown, proving that a gentleman’s agreement simply isn’t enough to define the process.

Alongside the desire for democratic and institutional reforms and strengthening the role of the parliament as the directly elected institution, some vast structural and political topics are on the horizon. Enlargement of the Union, multi-speed Europe, climate change, migration and integration, and the digital revolution are among those that will be particularly decisive for the future of our society. There are many challenges but even more opportunities ahead of us.

Enjoy the read and may it spark your inspiration to shape the future of Europe.

Svenja Hahn MEP

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Communicating the Europe of today: Just Do It!

Ashmita Krishna

The last European Union (EU) elections in May 2019 showed the highest turnout since 1994 (Europarl, 2019). A total of 50.62 per cent of EU citizens voted, while five years ago, the turnout was only 42.61 per cent. This was celebrated as a big success by many newspapers (NL Times, 2019). After all, in our political systems based on democracy, a high turn-out can be seen as a proxy for engagement. Does this mean the EU has finally established its place? Was the #thistimeimvoting campaign a success? Is this a sign that all budget spent on communication and engagement was worth it? While at the time of writing there is limited material available on why the last elections were more successful than those of five years ago, several potential reasons can be mentioned: Brexit, the threat of populist parties, climate change debate, Trump... The results of the elections show that now – perhaps more than ever – there is a divergence in views of what the EU should look like (Sputnik News, 2019). An exploration of these external factors would make an interesting study, but the present paper will focus on the EU's communication efforts. While we can be optimistic that half of voters turned to the polls in May, half stayed at home. That reveals that the EU has some serious homework to do when it comes to communication. This paper will explore which communication lessons could make a change for the better.

What is the matter?

About 50% of the eligible voters decided to stay at home during the last EU elections, or at least somewhere else rather than the polling station. If we accept the hypothesis that the cause is to be found in the field of EU communications, let us look at some examples of how that translates into low turnout.

According to Margrethe Vestager (ALDE), the EU is failing to communicate and many people simply do not know that the elections are taking place. Vestager explains that this is partly because of the paradox of voting being a private act, but a major impetus to vote being the behaviour of those around us: “If your mother is voting, is very likely that you are voting.”

As for Bas Eickhout (Greens), bipartisanship has played a big role in this lack of interest, depicting European politics as a match between pro-Europeans and Populists. He maintains that the different positions among pro-European parties can make a difference in the direction the EU will take. He reminded voters that the main parties have been ruling the European Union for the last 25 years and should take responsibility for the lack of interest of voters. “What matters this time is that for the first time ever, those two blocks probably won’t have the majority alone” and that, he adds, presents an opportunity to do something different (Euronews, 2019).

While the Commissioner focuses on the difficulty of reaching the voters and the MEP claims that voters are not interested themselves, both of these examples reveal one of the EU’s fundamental struggle: the EU struggles to sell its story.

Selling a story

Storytelling is an ancient art which has been discovered and rediscovered by schools, NGOs, and businesses alike. Storytelling can enhance empathy, increase people's ability to identify and recall key messages, and improve engagement (Zak, J. Paul, 2014). Storytelling has the power to build deep and meaningful relationships.

If we look at the information page of the European Union for citizens it looks as follows (European Union, 2019):



Just looking at this might give readers flashbacks to exams to be studied for. While the EU does make an effort to communicate, this communication is high on jargon and low on impact. As also argued by Stavros Papagiannas (2017), who indicates that many factors contribute to inefficient EU communication: “the lack of leadership, the absence of a shared vision and a common European

public sphere, poor knowledge of the EU, hostile media, EU red tape, unethical practices in politics, the ‘blame game’ on European issues, multilingualism, scandals and austerity.” All contribute to the EU’s incapacity to communicate its policies and achievements in a transparent and clear way. In his book ‘Rebranding Europe’, Papagiannenas (2017) provides a couple of lessons on how the EU could do a better job of starting a dialogue. Examples of these include communicating Europe at both EU and national levels, making things easier for journalists and making EU communication a strategic priority instead of an administrative task. In her paper, Magdalena Wnuk (2019) pleads that MEPs should be one of the most important actors and facilitators, communicating European values and benefits to the people. After all, the elected members of the European parliament (MEP) from their countries are the closest link citizens have to the EU.

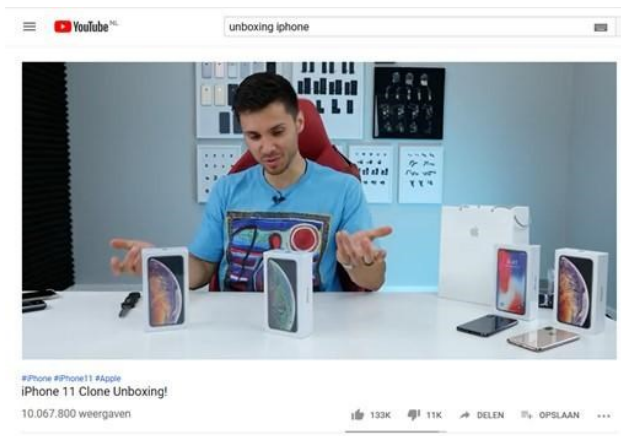
Let’s face it: The EU is far away and has to balance many interests. Communication is seen as distant and as a one-way street. The EU needs something transformational in order to make a real positive change. The EU needs to find inspiration from those who were once there and changed for the better. The EU needs a branding update and could learn from big businesses like Apple, Ikea, Starbucks and Nike.

Some lessons which can be borrowed from business

The three examples below could be adapted and applied to EU communication strategies (Stevens, 2019).

1: Redefine the user experience

Think of the many unboxing videos on Youtube, especially those from Apple. Apple knows how much user experience can influence the success of a brand. The same accounts for Ikea which is probably one of the few companies where ‘good food’ and ‘kids zone’ will be used in the same sentence with reference to a furniture company.

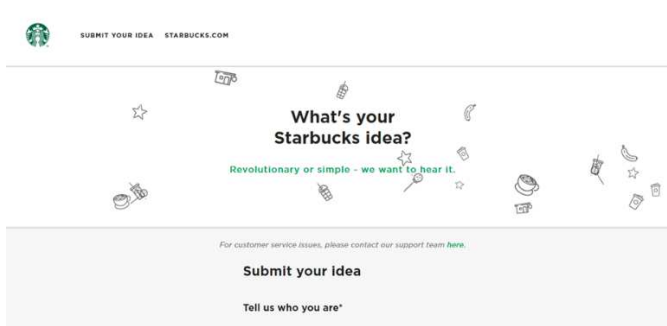


How can the EU redefine the user experience of its citizens? What is this current experience (e.g.: customer/citizen journey) and how can that be changed in a positive way? Who could help and how?

2: Get users involved — people will support what they help create

Starbucks is a great example with the ‘My Starbucks Idea’ portal. Through this portal, customers can submit ideas and vote or comment on the ideas of others on how Starbucks can improve its products. Not only is Starbucks able to get feedback, but it deepens the involvement of its

users in the brand and as a result their loyalty to it. The portal is very lovable through its simplicity. It is comparable to leaving a review on Yelp or Tripadvisor.



If a European citizen wishes to submit an idea, they have to go through an [extensive process](#) of bureaucracy in order to find out if their idea is feasible and can be submitted as a citizen's initiative. Think of all the potential great ideas going to waste because they never make it through this process.

3: Ensure your brand is able to evoke a feeling

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” – Maya Angelou

There are many examples of brands which do this very well and in a consistent way: think of Nike. It's not just a shoe, it's enabling you to achieve great things in the gym or anywhere on the sports field. The brand is able to evoke feelings and capture very different target groups (Sneaker News, 2019).



As for the European Union – what is its identity? How can this be promoted (Ciaglia, Fuest, Heinemann, 2018)? What feeling (if any) does it invoke by its communication?

Concluding, this paper has shown some tough love towards the European Union when it comes to its way of communicating and inspiring engagement, as well as certain branding issues which can be identified. The EU can show more leadership when it comes to making communication an urgent strategic priority, rather than an administrative task. This essay presented some techniques for improving communication which can be borrowed from companies. As Epictetus said so wisely: ‘we have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak’.

Lessons from Yugoslavia and Brexit – why Europe needs a drive for liberal civic education

Tim Robinson

Twenty-seven years ago, much to the shock and horror of its inhabitants, shells began falling on the city of Sarajevo, as Bosnian Serb forces encircled the predominantly Bosniak capital city in a siege that would last three years. The federal government of Yugoslavia had collapsed, and in its wake, a plethora of warring ethnic rump states had been left to battle for overlapping territorial claims in a tiny corner of South-Eastern Europe. The humble city in which the first world war began – supposedly ‘the war to end war’ – saw war return for the third time in a century. Over the ensuing three years of war, about 2 million people were displaced from and within the former Yugoslavia (USCRI, 1997). Many of those, my mother among them, fled to the safety of the fledgling European Union, where she made a new home in Britain.

Yugoslavia may have been a nominally communist state at the time of its collapse, but Yugoslavism was far from being the exclusive ideological domain of the League of Communists. At its core, Yugoslavia, a union of six South Slavic nations, was a project in setting aside centuries of ethnic and religious tension to build a common future, and throughout its existence, its politics was characterised by constant antagonism between federalists and ethnic

nationalists. Liberal-minded Yugoslavs like my grandparents had no qualms with the ruling communist party, but the collapse of that ideal was still devastating nonetheless. Yugoslavia's federal motto – *bratsvo i jedinstvo*, fraternity and unity – was a short but simple explanation of what Yugoslavia meant to them. And although undeniably there are substantive differences, it is a motto that eerily echoes what the European Union symbolises to the liberals of 21st century Europe.

Twenty-four years later, on the 24th June 2016, I awoke to news that I never thought I would hear: the United Kingdom had voted to leave the European Union. Given the publication in which you are reading this essay, it should not come as a surprise that I, like most British liberals, opposed this course of action. And for balance, it must be admitted that Britain Stronger in Europe – the remain campaign – was ill-prepared and mismanaged. But even broaching the issue from a position of neutrality, it would seem impossible to ignore that disinformation – and at times even the propagation of outright falsities – played a crucial role in the winning Leave campaign (Farand, 2017). Turkey is not “joining the European Union”, as billboards had proclaimed on the side of British motorways throughout the spring of 2016 (Sabbagh, 2018). The UK does not “send £350m a week to Brussels” as was printed along the side of the Vote Leave campaign bus, nor, it has emerged, can said money be “spent on the NHS instead” following Britain's departure (Weissman, 2016; Lee, 2018). And whilst it

may be true that certain EU regulations seem superfluous, it was misleadingly implied that these regulations were imposed on the UK without due process. A fascinating example is that of regulations covering noise limits for domestic lawnmowers. This example was employed by the Leave campaign to illustrate the ‘ridiculous’ nature of EU regulations – critically overlooking the fact that the regulation had not just been voted for by the UK at the Council of the EU, but that it had actually been authored by a British commissioner (Stephens, 2019).

As a British-Yugoslav, it was my mother’s reaction to this process that was most fascinating: a strange sense of déjà vu. The disinformation she heard in 2016 echoed uncomfortably the rhetoric used by warmongering nationalist politicians in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Having lived through the consequences of that rhetoric in Yugoslavia, she would not have countenanced voting to leave the European Union. And yet, a majority of the British public, most of whom had no such past experience, were receptive to that disinformation, and awarded the leave campaign its narrow victory.

But Brexit did not occur in a vacuum, and Britain did not succumb to a disease unheard of in other European countries. Rather, Brexit is the most prominent outcome in a wave of support for populist and nationalist politics across Europe. The same ploy of using disinformation to take advantage of ignorance has been employed by Eurosceptic nationalist and populist parties across the continent. In Austria in 2017, the far-right entered

government for the first time since the 1930s. Italy is now governed by Western Europe's first wholly populist government in modern times. And despite all the success of liberals at the European Parliament elections in May, a far-right party – the *Rassemblement National* – topped the national poll in France (AFP/The Local Fr, 2019). Not just in Britain, but throughout Europe, ignorance of our common history and the dangers of nationalism and populism, seems to pose a threat to the European project.

But it is important to destigmatise this concept of 'ignorance'. Ignorance is oftentimes taken to be synonymous with stupidity; it is not. Rather, it is a consequence of a dereliction of duty by national governments to educate their young people about the world we live in. And as such, it can be fixed through better civic education. The grand irony of Brexit is that it is only after the referendum that the public have started to become genuinely informed about what the EU is, how it works, and what it has achieved. Much to the chagrin of a Conservative government that thought the referendum would settle the question of Britain's membership of the EU, the result has made it the single dominating political issue in the UK for the past three years. With Brexit headlines almost a daily feature in the British media, it has become impossible for schools not to teach their students about the history and function of the EU to an extent never before seen in our education system.

According to a recent survey by YouGov, 87% of voting British 18-20 year olds – those voters too young to have

taken part in the referendum in 2016 – would now vote to remain in the European Union (BMG Research/OFOC, 2019). What separates these voters from their older, leave-voting counterparts? Those 18-20 year olds surveyed, freshly graduated from our schools, are the best informed about Europe of any generation in our history. I was 18, and less than a year out of school when the referendum was held, and yet, when I speak to students just a few years younger than myself, they know that the European Union originated as a peace project. They seem to know about the four freedoms and the benefits they bring. They seem to know about the UK's budget rebate, and that our elected MEPs have a final say on every piece of EU legislation. They know about the European Union in ways that would have had students in my own graduating year dumbfounded (Dawson, 2019; Haigis, 2019). And by more than 6 to 1, they believe the UK should remain in the European Union. No clearer could the evidence behind the case for liberal civic education be: it can effect a sea change in perspective in a shockingly brief period of time.

Indeed, it is not just in Britain that this effect seems to have been felt. Appropriately in line with the idea of learning from history's mistakes, the realities of Brexit seem to have caused a re-appraisal of the value of the European Union in the eyes of Europeans far and wide. Across continental Europe, populist parties that once flirted with idea of leaving the Union have finally come to

realise that such would be an egregious error (Harlan, 2019).

However, simply because they do not wish to leave the Union does not mean that they are not still a threat to the values that it represents. In Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, Serbian nationalists did not initially wish to disintegrate the Federation as their counterparts in other Yugoslav republics did, but rather, to take control of it, and change the fundamental substance of the union (Oproiu, 2011). I fear that the same tactic may now have been adopted by Eurosceptic populists and nationalists, who will seek not to leave the Union, but rather, to mutate it from within, into something we cannot recognise. Though Brexit has been a lesson learnt, I fear it may be a lesson shortly forgotten. Only a sustained push for better civic education will produce the lasting effect needed to overcome populism and nationalism.

The tragedy of civic education in post-referendum Britain is that it may have come too late. One can only imagine how different the last few years may have played out politically had British schools begun properly teaching about the EU a decade ago. But if there is one point to be taken from the discussions of this essay, it is that mistakes – and to any liberal, the Brexit referendum results should be considered one – are a learning opportunity. But that opportunity is squandered if poor civic education enables populists and nationalists to manipulate political outcomes through disinformation. In the 21st century, this has become a threat to the liberal vision of a united

Europe. Only a radical push for civic education by liberals throughout Europe can defeat the plague of populism and nationalism that has beset 21st century Europe. When ignorance is pandemic, education becomes a weapon in the fight against it. How else can the next generation build a better Europe if our education systems do not arm them with that weapon?

Western Balkans on its way to European Union membership

Marko Zivkovic

The Western Balkans is well-known as one of the most changeable regions in Europe. 68 years ago, when the European Coal and Steel Community was established as the forerunner of the European Union, there were two states in Western Balkans: Yugoslavia and Albania, whilst today there are 6 plus one. From the previous large Yugoslavia, the Western Balkans today counts Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo, whose status, 11 years after its declaration of independence, is still not quite clear. From 1951 until today, there have been several wars on Western Balkans territory, finishing with the NATO bombing in 1999, when approximately 150 000 people died, and over 4 000 000 were left internally displaced.

All of these factors explain why the region is still experiencing difficulties in international cooperation and reconciliation, and why it is witness to growing levels of nationalism. These conflicts are a consequence of decades of communist leadership in this region and after the failure of communism, the actions of leaders of former Yugoslavia states starting wars. To a greater or lesser extent, they achieved their goals, but left behind only poverty, hate and many unresolved problems. Whilst it might be painful to forget the past, it is also important to look ahead to a new future, and not to let old tensions

colour present political discourse, fuel populism or revive nationalism.

Countries in this region have been living in this kind of post-conflict uncertainty for two decades. But we are now 20 years on from all those events. Not enough time to forget, but more than enough to overcome conflicts, and for Western Balkan states to start solving the problems of the past and to try to become members of European Union as soon as possible. After all, that is the only logical step to allow the Western Balkans to become normal and modern countries. Mutual cooperation between states in the region is the best way to speed up the EU integration of Western Balkan countries. If they work together on solving their conflicts from the past and on fulfilling their obligations, they will certainly easily fight for their membership in EU.

The present situation is very different: authorities in the Western Balkan have in recent years tended to spin conflicts. Before each election the authorities have often recalled the problems of the past to justify their populist moves and revolutionize nationalist-minded voters. The rhetoric of many present leaders in the Western Balkans is potentially very harmful and could further provoke a rise in nationalism in this region.

Nationalist leaders, through their controlled media, send frequent messages that they are the only political option to lead the Balkans to EU membership. Messages like those are not only harmful to the objective minds of voters, but they also reduce support for EU. Such a

reduction is not only present among opposition voters, but also among supporters of the authorities. The opposition argues that the European Union supports populist regimes and therefore they no longer wish to pursue EU integration, while supporters of the authorities believe the European Union to be responsible for all unpopular decisions in the country. The situation is likely to remain the same until the Western Balkans are led by politicians who promote reconciliation and regional cooperation.

Thus, it is time to stop being frightened of the past as if it were a ghost chasing us around every corner and waiting for its great comeback, but to finally learn some lessons. Beginning in our own homes, with our selves, our neighbours, families, and friends, who will no longer grow up, from one generation to another, in a spirit of hatred, chauvinism and intolerance towards everything that is different. It is the duty of all Western Balkan people to understand that we are not each others' enemies, but colleagues, and that only together can we keep peace and stability between our borders and become desirable and exemplary partners for organisations such as the European Union. At the political level, it is the duty of liberal organisations to explain not only to their members and voters, but also to all citizens, no matter their political orientation, the necessity of accepting and endorsing human and minority rights, democracy and European values. The moment we accept them in ourselves, we will officially become members of the European family to which we certainly belong.

I, as a young, politically conscientious person, call to spreading these ideas among my contemporaries whose duty it is and has to be to, to remember the lessons of the past, to build another, serious future. Not a future where the goal will be to run away as fast as they can and develop themselves privately in other countries, but to set the democratic foundation in their own countries. Young people have always been leaders of political change – even the toughest ones in the region – but the 21st century is the era of new roads, technologies, ideas and communications which can be good foundations for opening new liberal pathways. Those are the pathways of cooperation, development, sharing art and culture, accepting customs, experiences and, above all, of learning. We must not only learn from past mistakes, but we must also look to the present. In the European arena, there is certainly enough space for the spirit of the Western Balkans. This view is shared by the European Union and by citizens in the Balkans. Therefore, let's encourage the future generation to confirm the European pathway of this region, for it is a route they have already decisively embarked upon. The close cooperation of several liberal organisations in the region is a good proof, not only at the local level, but also through many international fora, of the strength and energy of young people and the role they can play in bringing the European Union a certain and close future for the Western Balkans.

Liberal values are the only hope for our region. If we manage to win against populism and nationalism, we will have a great chance to spread our liberal values, most notably freedom of speech, the rule of law, mutual respect

and peaceful politics. I strongly believe that this is the best way for the Western Balkans to become modern, progressive, European, countries as their citizens deserve.

Enlargement and its effect on 2030 EU climate & energy goals

Margaux Carron

What is a liberal vision for Europe's energy market? This paper focuses on political actions, inferred as liberal, which can be put in place in order to incentivize markets to reach the EU's 2030 climate and energy goals. The example of the Western Balkans, taking Serbia as a case study, was deemed an interesting focus. The region is currently lagging far behind when it comes to renewable and low-polluting energy sources. In addition, the region faces a number of challenges which demand a multi-dimensional approach. Furthermore, the way the EU can influence external states is a perfect example of how the EU can use its position to influence without dictating; a position which can also be used when dealing with member States.

In 2014, the European Commission released its 2030 climate and energy goals "for a competitive, secure and low-carbon EU economy". These goals include a 40% cut in greenhouse gas emissions (based on 1990 levels), at least a 32% share for renewable energy and a 32.5% improvement in energy efficiency. The EU's long-term strategy is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80-95% compared to 1990 levels by 2050.

Currently, the main energy sources of Western Balkan countries are local coal, local hydropower and imports such as Russian oil and gas (Lachert, Kaminski, 2019, p.14). 70% of Serbia's energy output is powered by coal,

and the 30% remaining comes from hydropower (ibid, p.17). Serbia's installed hydro capacity is the highest in the region. In 2017, hydropower in the country generated 2835 MW (Hydropower Balkans, 2017). Although efforts have been made to increase renewable energy sources such as hydropower, Serbia's main dependence is on non-renewable energy. 99% of its fossil fuels are coal. The other 1% is attributed to oil and gas. However, 76% of these reserves are in Kosovo. In 2010, 33.5 % of Serbia's energy was imported. 84.5 % of Serbia's gas consumption relies on imports, where as 71% of oil is imported (Lachert, Kaminski, 2019, p.19). In the meantime, energy consumption is increasing, with a 10.5 % increase projected for 2025 rising to 16.3 % by 2030 (Serbia Energy, 2014). Regionally, the total power generation capacity of the region was of 17.6 GW in 2018; 48% of that capacity is attributed to coal, 46% to hydropower, 4% to gas and the remaining 2% to oil (Lachert, Kaminski, 2019, p.16).

The transition to renewable and low-polluting energy sources depends on a variety of factors. Local actors must have the capacity and the will to support the process. As described above, current energy sources in the Western Balkan region are mostly dependent on coal. Climate change aside, there is no incentive to transform the local energy industry. Local resources are available and provide for security in terms of supply as well as contributing to local economies. Lignite mining industries are particularly important in Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia (Nechev, Svilans, 2017). Low incentive to change is reflected in the struggle of Western Balkan governments to develop renewable-oriented energy

strategies. National portfolios across the region rely almost exclusively on lignite and hydropower to generate electricity. National energy strategies do not envisage a significant decrease in lignite use and in most cases the contrary is true. Serbia's 2014 energy strategy envisions to install 1,050 MW of new coal-fired power plants by 2030, 700 MW of which would be installed by 2025. Although the strategy does mention energy efficiency as a major challenge of future energy development in the country, with a necessary focus on renewable energy sources and decreasing the negative impact on the environment (Serbia Energy, 2014), the country is struggling to put these intentions into practice. Serbia has failed to execute its commitment to have 27% of its electricity come from renewable energy by 2020 (Lachert, Kaminski, 2019, p.17).

In addition, the economic situation of the region means that national energy portfolios are largely influenced by the availability of financing and respecting the acquis (European Commission, 2019). The lack of fully transparent and open energy markets affects the ability of respective governments to adapt to changing market dynamics, and their inability to secure investments limits infrastructure development. Funding dedicated to renewable energy has mainly been provided by the EU. As of 2005, all Balkan countries have been part of the Energy Community (EnC). This community is essential in addressing key challenges in transitioning to a transparent and open energy market in the Balkans and securing investment for energy infrastructure. The EU has also established numerous financing instruments such as the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) and

Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF) (Nechev, Svilans, 2017, p.1). While the EU is still the most important foreign contributor, EU Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been decreasing, while FDI from China, Russia and the Gulf States is increasing. China is predominantly financing lignite mining and power generation. The \$715 million expansion of a Serbian lignite mine and construction of new lignite power generation is for the most part financed by China's Export Import Bank (ibid, p.3). Russia is known to have influence by exerting pressure on gas supplies to the region (Lachert, Kaminski, 2019, p.14). Although their influence is limited, as Russian gas only accounts for around 2% of total primary energy supply in the Balkans, compared to a 23% average for OECD countries (Nechev, Svilans, 2017, p.4), Russia remains the chief gas supplier in the region. It provides 2 billion cubic meters of gas to Serbia via Hungary and Ukraine. In Serbia, efforts are being made to diversify Russia-sourced gas by initiatives such as the construction of the Serbian-Bulgarian route, which will contribute to connecting Southeastern European countries through their energy supplies (Lachert, Kaminski, 2019, p.18).

Although nothing in the current regional market is pushing towards an energy transition, energy has a consequential effect on climate change. 60% of total global greenhouse emissions are attributed to energy (United Nations). Pushing towards an energy transition is a global concern for the survival of our societies. In order to change energy sources across the world, we would need to triple investment in sustainable energy infrastructure per year, from around \$400 billion (365 billion EUR) now

to \$1.25 trillion by 2030 (United Nations). The EU can influence countries to push towards this transition. A major migration passage, a hub for organised crime and a buffer zone between Russian and Chinese influence, the EU has every reason to invest in the development of the Western Balkans region, to secure good relations with each of its nations and to promote regional cooperation. Not to mention that failing to mitigate the effects of climate change will greatly influence worldwide migration flows, is likely to create a fight for resources and economic strain, all of which will undoubtedly have an effect on both the Western Balkans and the European Union.

Barriers preventing the Western Balkans' transition to renewable energies come in the form of political uncertainty and government interference in judicial affairs. This affects regulatory and legislative reform and results in enterprises shying away from setting up business in the region (ibid). Geopolitical ties in the region further hinder progress towards renewable energy. Russia's interests in the Western Balkans are tied to economic matters and ideological positions. 10% of Serbia's economy is linked, directly or indirectly, to Russian entities (Center for the Study of Democracy, 2018). The current status quo is unquestionably favourable to Russian business in the region, which has transpired through its actions in recent years. In 2008, the energy agreement between Russia and Serbia allowed Gazprom to takeover Serbia's largest oil and gas firm Nafta Indsutija Srbije NIS (Center for the Study of Democracy, 2018, p.2).

Serbia-Kosovo relations are also a major stalling point to EU accession and influence the Serbian energy sector, as most of Serbia's mining reserves are in Kosovo. Russia has backed Serbia's non-recognition of Kosovo as an independent State. The accession of Western Balkan countries to the EU will certainly affect Russian economic ties in the region, as they will be tied to EU regulations. There are various examples of contracts which have only been allowed through public procurement practices which violate EU norms on competition and transparency (ibid, p.4). China also has no interest in seeing Western Balkans countries join the EU; the current conditions allow for the creation of favourable economic relations with preferential conditions (Lachert, Kaminski, 2019, p.23). Economic interests which would favour keeping options open to other external investors than the EU could hinder the willingness of local influencers to advance the EU accession process or to push to fully attain EU goals regarding energy sources. This can greatly impact the way energy sources are developed in the region in the coming years, as apart from the EU, external actors, and to a certain extent local actors, have not shown interest in investing in clean energy in the region.

Taking these challenges into account, how could the EU further influence the direction that local energy markets in the region are taking? The risk of direct EU-funding and intervention is that local ownership of change processes is diminished and the market is placed in the hands of rigid governments instead of innovative and adaptive companies. On the other hand, if the EU fails to create enough incentives for crucial partners to adhere to their objectives, external actors will continue to influence the

development of local markets and local actors might not see the use of, nor have the capacity to, invest in the Western Balkan energy transition.

Recommendations

Using international incentives to influence legislation in the Western Balkans allowing for transparent and innovative markets to develop. The EU already has at its disposal a number of tools which can be further utilized to ensure that Western Balkan States put in place legislation which allows local markets to be transparent and competitive. State subsidies to energy infrastructure and fossil fuels should be limited. Foreign companies' implantation or investments in the region should be eased (for example, by relaxing local requirements on foreigners opening local businesses). Procurement contracts should be transparent and open to a competitive market. Eco-friendly criteria should be inserted in procurement contract requirements. Awareness on the benefits of renewable energy should be facilitated by the state, while allowing conditions for households to receive low-priced green energy.

Giving EU businesses incentives to invest in the region. EU Member States should increase incentives for their businesses to invest in the region. This could take the form of allowing business to compensate emissions by investing in green energy in the Western Balkans. In order for this to work, CO₂ permits should be limited and should decrease over time to gradually diminish general CO₂ emissions.

Investing in local stability and democratic governance.

Political insecurity and corruption can greatly influence the attractiveness of the region for business. Investing in international organisations and local civil society organisations who support the democratisation and increase the capacities of local governments is an essential step in securing the transition to renewable energy. Furthermore, facilitating regional cooperation through regional projects is essential to support the development of grid interconnection, notably throughout Serbia and Kosovo (Esser, Schulz, Dimsdale, Amon, Littlecott, Reizenstein, 2019, p.7).

Incentivising local ownership and individual capacity.

Change at the grassroot level is the most durable and effective process. The decentralisation of processes is key to the EU's success. Locals know what works best in their markets and have the connections to spark innovation. The EU should not be seen as an authoritarian bureaucratic monstrosity, but as a tool for cooperation and a resource for neighbouring states. Individuals should have the capacity to participate in the transition of their countries. The EU could contribute by allowing academic and professional exchange with Western Balkan youth. The possibility to come and learn about new energy technology in EU schools, universities and companies via a scholarship would be beneficial to all parties. Future professionals could be further incentivised to open a local businesses by receiving a fund after their exchange when they open a local business compliant to green and EU conditions. Finally, a community of governors, whose representatives champion the transition to renewable

energy and push their cities to connect to renewable power grids should be created at the local political level.

Endangered children: the Hungarian case

Csenge Schönviszky

*A politician thinks of the next election. A statesman, of
the next generation.'*

James Freeman Clarke

In 2008, the Great Recession's second wave hit Europe not only as an economic disaster, but also as a social problem. The hardest hit were those countries, in which the entire economic, political and societal landscape stood on unreliable funding grounds during that period. As the last periods show, there is an economic crisis in every decade, history repeats itself. One group that has been particularly affected are young people. There was a vast increase in child poverty between 2008 and 2014, the highest increase being in Greece with 29% and the lowest in the UK only with 1%. In most European countries the average was between 7 and 9 per cent. The impact of a new crisis on the upcoming generation could be irreversible, if we do not prepare for it with some much-needed reform. Through their wages, the youth are going to be support to their retired compatriots. These young people are also going to be the voters of tomorrow, who will determine the political landscape and priorities of the decades to come.

This essay will use Hungary as a case study to show who suffered most during the Great Recession in 2008 and who will therefore be affected in the upcoming economic crisis. Although the government is trying to support

families in the post-austerity era, to ensure they and their children have a good living environment, child-poverty in Hungary is higher than the EU average. This essay will draw on the findings of Gabos and Toth in their 2017 article “Recession, Recovery, and Regime Change: Effects on Child Poverty in Hungary”.

After the economic hit, the government in Hungary accelerated the abolition and reduction of various cash bonuses and allowances awarded to families in order to avoid public debt and to adjust to the economic crisis. Nevertheless, the conservative government elected in 2010 made some important structural changes to family policy in order to stop the increase of child poverty. However, according to the EU-SILC database, child poverty is still gradually increasing. Since austerity, unemployment increased from 7.8% to 11.4% in the period 2008-2010 (Eurostat, 2018), which has an impact on both present and future societies. The ‘future society’ are the people, who were children during the Great Recession and who, in a few years, will support the decision-makers of 2008. The main effect of austerity and of high-unemployment was that child poverty has increased from 18.8 %, which was averagely high, to 20.3% (Tárki, 2014). Family benefits and childcare allowance can help parents to care for their children, in those areas where money is the only problem. However, why was the government not able to decrease child poverty via cash benefits and why did children have to bear the brunt of the impacts of the Great Recession?

According to Gábos’ and Tóth’s research, the poverty risk among Roma children is particularly high. This group is

doubly marginalised: being young and belonging to a minority group. Prior to times of austerity, in 2005 only 35% of Roma children lived below the poverty line, however by 2012 this number had risen to 80% (Tárki, 2014). The Great Recession exerted its damage mostly on Roma children, whose living situation was more disadvantageous than the average – such as those who live in bigger cities, where the parents are poorly-educated and children live in households with unemployed parents. They have to face territorial disadvantages too. After 2008, it was almost unimaginable for Roma people to be able to find a proper job, for which they could earn more than the minimum wage, especially after the minimum wage was risen by the government in 2010. Since then, most of the Roma families' wealth comes from benefits. The ruling conservative party took steps to improve family policies, however those mainly benefitted the middle classes and they moved away from extreme poverty. These acts were meant to prevent the impact of the crisis have generated a bigger impact for the Roma society.

The integration of Roma into the community was forgotten by the Party. The consequences of this were twofold: firstly, child-poverty highly increased among Roma children and secondly, the government took from them the chance to be the part of the community, which in turn means they have fewer opportunities in the education system (Kertesi and Kézdi, 2006). This means that Roma children have fewer chances to come out of poverty. Moreover, children are unmotivated to go to school due to the lack of successful role models. These children's

parents are often poorly educated, unable to find a steady profession because of the high unemployment rates and have lost hope in a better life. Due to their cultural and living methods, the Roma do not necessarily only need cash benefits, but their society and their children need extra social help. The government should not only concentrate on those, whose losses during the austerity are repairable with allowances, but they should offer real social steps to stop the increase of child poverty. However they can only do this by sending social workers to those places where children have lost interest in studying and where aid can improve their standard of living.

Despite this urgent need, according to Lestyánszky's (2015) article, social worker's salaries and benefits were cut by the government after the crisis of 2008. Some have lost their jobs, others have managed to find a proper professional placement, but are not being paid enough to cover their expenses. Thus, there is another problem which has been caused by the Great Recession; people are being dissuaded from studying social work because of the low wages. By this token, in poorer areas, where social workers would be needed to help to decrease child poverty, there are only a few staff on hand. Education, including getting a university degree, is the key to accessing a normal future. Yet it is not clear how Gábos and Tóth could think about a future society, where there is less poverty among all children, including Roma and other ethnic groups when they have no opportunity to leave extreme poverty without an effective programme by the government?

This decisive problem, present in Hungary and many other European Union member states, needs an urgent solution. The roots of child poverty go back a long way, but the desperate situations of some children has been exacerbated by austerity. Despite the childcare allowance given by the government, ministers are still not working on a functional programme, which could solve the serious impact inflicted by austerity and think about long-term solutions for the future of our society. The government has made some efforts to adapt to economic deterioration; however, their approach misses out the future generation. European states need to set up preventive measures to reduce the damage to a minimum if a new crisis is coming. The aim should be that every child has the same opportunity, regardless of their ethnicity or background. A resilient country could be achieved through a strong, democratic government, which emphasises three social sectors: education, healthcare and children. These three elements are key for ensuring a stable future state and society, and their support should be provided by the national government with the help of the EU.

In 2016, according to Eurostat, there were 25 million children under the age of 18 across the EU at risk of poverty. This number could increase during the next economic crisis, but if the EU countries worked together they would be able to protect the future generation from the upcoming problem. Given the role that these young people will play in shaping the future of tomorrow, an investment in children benefits not only the present society but future generations.

Future of Europe Is Green

Dmytro Naumchuk

*When did the future switch from being a promise to
being a threat?*

Chuck Palahniuk, Invisible Monsters

Imagine that one day, you look at a map and you no longer find Venice, for it has been submerged in water. Picture a Greek child walking to school through a desert-like wasteland with images of beautiful parks existing solely in the memories of his parents. Contemplating this picture might be difficult, but that is the reality predicted by science and research that await us in close future. Climate change is shaping our common future in Europe as well as worldwide. This subject is not limited by any state boundary and thus states and international organisations should make common efforts to reduce the negative impact of climate change. Preserving nature is not merely a matter of concern for environmentalists, but rather a major issue for humankind. If we choose to ignore the environmental debate, the very lives of our descendants may be at risk. We should act now and act fast.

Since the 19th century, our economy has been based on the “take, make, dispose” model of production, when all resources were used to meet the growing demand of consumers. This approach ignores the “recycle” stage of consumption, and disregards environmental impact, leading to irreversible consequences for our planet. Today, ecology has risen up on the political agenda. Slowing down the upcoming environmental

disaster is now a matter of pressing importance. Even the youngest Europeans feel the need to demand better environmental policy frameworks. For instance, a 15 year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg has expressed fears common among many young people. The double-digit victory of the Green Party in the European Parliament elections in 2019 further proves the demand of people throughout Europe for politicians to encourage and manage the shift towards sustainable development.

The challenge is immense. Global climate change impacts Europe in many ways, including, but not limited to: changes in average temperature, extreme precipitation, warmer oceans, rising sea levels, shrinking snow and ice cover on land and at sea. These have led to a range of impacts on ecosystems, socio-economic sectors and human health. According to the EEA Report No 1/2017 on “climate change, impacts and vulnerability in Europe”, the severity and frequency of droughts appear to have increased in parts of Europe, in particular in southern and south-eastern Europe. Meteorological and hydrological droughts are projected to increase in frequency, duration, and severity in most of Europe, with the strongest increase projected for southern Europe (EEA, 2017). Environmental damage will not be the only consequence; climate change will increase competition for land and resources, with aftershocks felt beyond the immediately affected regions (European Reformists, 2019).

Such changes and challenges may further lead to desertification in the Mediterranean region; Central and Eastern European countries will be at high risk of land

fires and mortality from heat waves, as well as coastal and riverside flooding. Scientists have strong evidence that a few years from now, Europe will suffer from heavy loss of biodiversity. For instance, between 1990 and 2015, the common bird index decreased by 8% in the 26 EU Member States that have bird population monitoring schemes (EEA, 2018). Furthermore, it is estimated that up to 60% of species growing in the mountains around the Mediterranean Basin are threatened by extinction (Watson, 2012). Upon the best estimations, the average lifestyle will become impossible in several southern parts of Europe.

The European Union and its partners have the power to lead a global response to the environmental threat. Recent events show that the main global powers like the USA or China are not interested in mitigating the threat of climate change. While the Trump Administration declared the withdrawal of the USA from the Paris Climate Agreement, China keeps ignoring the standards of gas and waste emissions. The EU remains a key international actor, developing institutions and policies that can manage trade-offs and tap into a political community with the capacity for collective problem-solving². For instance, the European Union has made some real progress in the implementation of environmental policies, namely on the reduction of CO₂ emissions and plastic waste, or in the replacement of coal in the production of electricity. According to Johannes Baur, Head of Operations for "Economic cooperation, energy, infrastructure and environment" at the EU Delegation to Ukraine, the EU has already decoupled emissions from economic growth: EU

Green House Gas emissions had fallen by 22 percent in 1990-2017, while the total EU GDP had grown by 58 percent” (UNDP Ukraine, 2019). That reflects the EU’s unusually rich resources: a community of law, a community of political solidarity, and deep transnational networks of expertise across business, science and academia communities, civil society organisations, national administrations, and supranational institutions².

Unfortunately, isolated and selective environmental policies will not stop climate change. It will continue for many decades as a result of past emissions and due to the inertia of the current climate system. It is therefore vitally important to implement more comprehensive measures through a new economic vision preserving the core liberal values such as freedom, well-being and security of all people, while using fewer natural resources and reducing pollution every year. A circular model of economy can be a real solution, as it aims at minimising waste and making the most of resources without creating a drop in the quality of life for consumers and without causing loss of revenue or requiring extra costs for manufacturers. In this way, the EU should bring powerful market forces to bear on environmental problems and to move towards circular economy with economic freedom and pragmatic individual action standing at the core of this transition. To this end, the EU could use economic and financial incentives as well as media resources in order to create proper conditions for functioning markets of waste and recycled raw materials. Consumers and business need to be encouraged to change their production and

consumption patterns and to become responsible for environmental impact of their activities.

We know that the climate change is a global challenge, so the efforts of the EU alone will not be enough to stop global warming and overcome other environmental problems. Thus, it is crucial for Europe to involve and encourage other countries such as members of the Eastern Partnership – through various trade preferences and market incentives –to actively design, adopt and implement effective environmental policies and transit to a new economic model. In such a case, the EU should by means of international trade agreements hold itself and its partners accountable to the commitments already made in supporting energy innovation and reducing pollution, as well as transitioning to circular economy. To catalyze the emergence of a clean energy–based political economy, Europeans should engage directly with state and local authorities, particularly in countries where the central government denies that climate change exists. The standards the EU sets for its large internal market of \$20 trillion tend to get adopted by other economies trading with it. The EU also has a history of setting new liberal policies and standards that serve the public interest. In the sphere of environmental protection, no single country has made as many efforts as the EU. This subsequently enhances and adds up to Europe’s global credibility (Valášekm 2019).

As one of the members of the Eastern Partnership and an EU trade partner, Ukraine unfortunately lacks the effectiveness to take responsibility for actions regarding

environmental issues. At the same time, the Ukrainian government is on its way to implementing the standards provided for in the bilateral trade agreement with the EU. The idea of tackling climate change and ensuring environmental protection is growing in popularity among young people and opinion leaders. For instance, members of the non-governmental organisation “European Youth of Ukraine” are actively participating in the Climate Change activities of the International Federation of Liberal Youth. Furthermore, non-governmental organisations such as “Ukraine without Trash” are encouraging people to sort their waste and to recycle. Like other Europeans, young Ukrainians are concerned for their future and want to support a shift in the Ukrainian economy to a circular form as well as to participate in forming a regional and global response to the risks of climate change.

If we manage to bring together the efforts of both the EU and the Eastern Partnership, we will shape our own future in a liberal, secure and green Europe. It will give us an opportunity to make Europe more climate-resilient, enhance its capacity to respond to the impacts of climate change at the local, regional, national, and global levels. The future of Europe depends directly on the actions of today’s generation. The only way forward for Europe is to become green.

A Stronger Bond through more Subsidiarity

Philipp Eng

The European Union (EU) is a construction that works well in general but struggles with one key structural issue: which decisions are to be made on which level (supranational, national, regional or local), each level is assigned its own competences. In order to fully embrace those competences, the level in question needs the power to enforce its own rules; even if those rules go against the will of a minority of federal parts (such as Member States) of the whole construction. This is known as subsidiarity, defined as “the principle that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level” (Oxford English Dictionary).

Subsidiarity could lead to a greater acceptance of rules among the Member States of the EU. In addition, moving from unanimity to majority voting systems can lead to a better enforcement of the rules that are made on each level, mainly on the international level of the EU.

Structural issues of the EU

The European Union was originally constructed to guarantee peace in Europe. The project succeeded in developing its values and ideas of a connected economy with a common dependence between States (European

Union, 2019). Yet a fundamental structural problem persists in the EU as a union of several different Member States. The priorities for making laws and solving problems in the EU are mostly set correctly (European Commission) – but the EU is missing clear and simple guidelines on which political level which legal and political decisions should be made, in order to keep the sovereignty of the states on one hand and to effectively solve the crucial international problems on the other. Whilst the EU Treaties provide for distinctions between exclusive competence, shared competence and competence to support, coordinate or supplement, these are sometimes still disputed and are not understood by the majority of citizens across Europe (European Commission). On recent core political issues, such as climate change and refugee issues, the EU has failed as a community. This is partly due to differing interests among the Member States, different values held by local populations, and different political systems, and partly because of structural reasons, such as the requirement of unanimity for important decisions. This paper argues that the EU has set the wrong objectives by centralising legal and political power. The EU needs to establish clear guidelines for functional multilevel governance.

The Swiss system

A good example of subsidiarity comes from the Swiss model. Switzerland has managed to successfully integrate several different economic, social and political systems into one unity: the Swiss state. Federalism in Switzerland helps to prevent its parts (the several cantons) from feeling

excluded from the political decisions in Switzerland. They feel that they are part of something bigger. Instead of centralising power and all decisions, Switzerland embraces the system of subsidiarity (Biaggini, n. 11) – and that is exactly what could help the EU as well. According to this system, basic political issues are ruled and controlled by towns and cities, who set their own laws. As soon as an issue gets bigger, more complicated or exceeds what the communes are able to handle legally, politically, or economically, the cantons step in and have the right to set rules and laws to manage the issue. The same thing happens in case of an issue that falls beyond the power of a canton; those problems are managed by the Swiss state (ibid). The Swiss system works via bottom-up decision-making process. Instead of a top-down organisation in which it can be unclear which level possesses which competences (EU or Member States); a bottom-up system gives the competence to make decisions to the next higher level as soon as they are recognised as being too difficult to be handled on the first level. It is almost an automatic rather than a political decision. The same kind of federal system needs to be introduced in the EU – where the European Member States take the role of the Swiss cantons.

Adapting the Swiss model for the EU

If the EU were to follow the Swiss model: every political issue that *can* be managed by the Member States, *must* be managed by the States and should not be centralised or managed by the EU. The EU needs a serious discussion

about the level on which political and legal decisions can and have to be made. According to the notion of subsidiarity, a decision always has to be made on the lowest level possible. In that way, each decision is better legitimated by society, when citizens feel included in the decision-making process and more direct democracy is achieved. There is no reason to believe that this kind of federalism that works on three levels in Switzerland, it could not work with a fourth level: the EU.

The States know their own culture, economy, society and country best. Therefore, they are better placed to set the law in most of the cases, in accordance with the political system that has been established a long time before the EU came up. Only those issues that stand beyond the power of each state can be legitimately managed and controlled by the EU itself. These issues include environmental politics such as global warming, refugee problems or international trade with strong economies all over the globe. On these questions, the EU needs to be strong and Member States should be confident in 'handing over' competences to the EU. On the other hand, decisions about food safety, wood trading or standards for room heating installations could be set at a lower decision level without any risk to the international community of the EU. To give a single example: decisions about solutions to the refugee problem or about climate change need to be made on the European level (international cooperation is obviously needed), whereas consumption habit laws (for instance a plastic cutlery ban) can easily and more appropriately be made by each Member State and according to the each society.

European States are very diverse in terms of culture, economy, health systems, social welfare, taxes, lifestyle, etc. These things cannot simply be integrated into a single union like the EU. We need to preserve their specialities and guarantee their autonomy. The Member States of the EU are too diverse to be set equal in many things. That is one of the reasons why the European Constitution was not accepted by several countries. A Member State needs to have the opportunity to disagree on the topics it feels strongly about; yet needs to accept European rules and laws in those topics in which international regulations are needed. All of that could be achieved by setting up a clear bottom-up process for making political decisions.

The result of such a reformed process would be greater appreciation and understanding of the EU in the eyes of the citizens. The way to strengthen the international bond between the European countries will not come as a result of more centralisation; neither states nor populations are ready to accept that. The bond will get stronger by keeping decisions closer to the people, not by outsourcing everything to Brussels.

“European taskforce for subsidiarity”

The European taskforce for subsidiarity, introduced by Jean-Claude Juncker in November 2017, took up exactly this topic (European Commission). Nevertheless, one problem persists: the idea of subsidiarity is still connected to people deciding about the level at which decisions should be made. Yet the easiest and most accepted way of

getting the highest subsidiarity possible is to let the system do it itself by giving the possibility of decision-making on the lowest political level possible. It is then only transferred to a higher level if there is evidence that the first level was too low for finding appropriate solutions.

A bottom-up federalist structure and freedom of decision making of the Member States is one of the most fundamental liberal aspects of people living together in a union like the EU. In fact, it would seem that the EU as a union can only endure the next decades if it adopts certain procedures and adapts its priorities according to the will of the majority of all its members. More centralisation cannot be the answer in the increasing fight for more sovereignty in some countries. The EU must see itself in a supporting role in those political, social and international issues that cannot be handled by the countries themselves. The EU needs a bottom-up structure, instead of a top-down mentality when it comes to the discussion about which decisions should be made on which level. A stronger bond and greater sense of trust can be achieved by granting more subsidiarity and autonomy for the States for decisions they can make themselves, and a stronger role for the EU for bigger international political issues.

Some might argue that following the will of the majority is more efficient. This idea often leads to the temptation to centralise the core of political and legal power, which is understandable. But considering that sovereign states still lie at the heart and origins of every international

organisation, and that these organisations draw their legitimacy from their members, it is important that states are given the chance to keep the greatest possible level of sovereignty. Decisions are always better received and accepted when citizens feel they were involved in making the decision. People will rather accept a decision they have been consulted about in advance, than a decision that has been made entirely by someone else.

Unanimity

Hand-in-hand with subsidiarity is the question of unanimity versus majority voting. The requirement of unanimity for important decisions leads to huge restrictions to the EU's capacity to act. An essential tenet of democratic decision-making and the possibility of showing strength in times of need, is decision-making by majority rather than by unanimity. If the consent of all member states is needed, then the EU will be unable to act in urgent and critical situations. The desire of federal member states to be part of an international construction also includes the acceptance its rules made by majority.

It is essential for a democratic power to have a strong mandate for action in such critical situations (for instance a refugee crisis which cannot effectively be solved by each member state alone). It should be part of the EU's competence to decide by majority – and against the will of a minority – in order to set through the rules that are legally made on the level of the EU.

Conclusion

This essay has exposed two important learnings for the EU: both the states and the EU need to be strengthened in their main competences, and these competences need to be clarified. We need to establish a system that allows for the adoption of important international decisions against a minority of Member States. Only then, can the political union truly work. On the other hand, the political decisions that can easily be made by the Member States and their populations, shall go back into their sphere of competence. They need the right and the possibility to set laws according to their political systems, culture, economy and state interests. Unnecessary centralisation is neither liberal, nor a good path for the future of the European Union.

The EU needs to be strong on major, international political issues – whilst keeping and guaranteeing the autonomy of individual states when it comes to smaller issues they can handle themselves. That would also bring about a stronger connection among Member States on the inside as well. In sum, a stronger bond can be achieved by *doing less on the level of the EU, but by doing it more effectively.*

Direct democracy: Opportunities for Europe

Leroy Bächtold

To Swiss citizens, the European Union may look like a large, non-transparent political machine that decides from Brussels what the European citizens must do and, for example, how strong a vacuum cleaner should be. The different European institutions including the European Council, the Council of the European Union or the European Parliament are, for outsiders, like the Swiss, not completely relatable to our political institutions. As a result of this lack of information, the majority of Swiss people have reservations, if not a negative attitude, towards the EU. This is reinforced by the lack of a true voice for citizens, which is so self-evident in Switzerland.

Yet instead of continuing to seal oneself off as Switzerland, on closer inspection there are in fact many similarities, and where there are differences in the political systems, these present opportunities to benefit from one another. This essay will analyse where exactly there are opportunities to benefit from the different political systems focusing on the feasibility and possibility of introducing direct democratic channels in the European Union. Assessing the benefits with measures like GDP, tax morality and higher citizen satisfaction will be backed up with data from Switzerland. The paper then works out a possible integration of direct democratic instruments into the European Union and

makes some recommendations on how to implement them.

The current situation of direct democracy in the EU

Europe has a long tradition of direct democracy and is the continent with the greatest experience of citizen participation. Of a total of 1405 national referendums documented worldwide since 1793, 62 per cent have been held in Europe. More recently the collapse of socialist countries and their integration into European structures have been major drivers of direct democracy in Europe (Pállinger, 2007). Although Europe enjoys great experience in direct democracy, the political reality in the EU is different.

Since its beginnings, the EU has focused more on representative than direct democracy. The fact that Eurogroup leader Jeroen Dijsselbloem says the doors to further talks have been closed to a Greek government announcement of a referendum shows how the European Union stands by direct democracy (Strupczewski, 2015). Since the 1980s, the European Union has focused increasingly on growing together. Integration in the EU is equated with increasing centralism, which is contrary to direct democracy. Instead of defining common goals regarding prosperity, peace or freedom, an increasing number of central state regulations are prescribed (Juncker, 2015). The institutions of the Union are increasingly equating the unification of the European countries with standardisation. This has the effect that regional peculiarities are assessed by the authorities as

damaging to the market or as disruptive factors. More and more attempts are being made to eradicate these peculiarities and to give Brussels more decision-making powers (Grimm, 2014).

The problems arising from this centralism are manifold. The German journalist Henryk M. Broder even goes as far as to say that the European Union is not threatened by European critics, but by the European institutions, which are working towards further centralisation. Regulations such as the ban on incandescent lamps or the EU standard for vacuum cleaners are causing many EU citizens to reject Brussels. The administrative budget of almost 9 billion Euros per year is responsible for further discontent among the population (Schuster, 2014). For comparison, the administrative budget of the central administration of Germany is a twentieth of the EU budget (444 million Euros per year) and arguably has more tasks to fulfil in running a country than the EU administration does in coordinating transnational cooperation (Bundesministerium der Finanzen, 2019).

Of course, national governments can also set up unnecessary regulations or have large administrative budgets at their disposal, but the regional proximity and the greater value of their vote in elections, makes this more bearable for many citizens. In the EU founding members France and Italy, only one third of the population has confidence in Brussels (Pütz, 2019).

An antidote to low levels of confidence in the EU and its centrist model could be a greater role for direct

democracy. Apart from the voluntary European Citizens' Initiative, there is no possibility for transnational political participation by citizens. The European right of initiative is an instrument of participatory democracy that enables European citizens to propose concrete legislative changes. A European Citizens' Initiative enables citizens from different Member States to come together on a subject close to their hearts to influence EU policy-making. To launch an initiative, 7 EU citizens living in at least 7 different Member States are required. Once an initiative has collected 1 million statements of support and reached the minimum values in at least 7 Member States, the European Commission must decide whether to take action. However, this instrument only leads to voluntary intervention by the European Commission and can be completely ignored, therefore it cannot be compared to binding democratic instruments and is not viable as a serious legislative process (European Commission, 2012).

Benefits of direct democracy on the example of Switzerland

In Switzerland, too, there are difference in the forms of direct democracy used by the different cities and municipalities. Since Switzerland is strongly federalist, it is up to the municipalities themselves to decide the extent to which citizens have a say in issues such as budget planning. This allows comparisons to be made between municipalities with higher levels of direct democracy and those with lower levels, to identify the advantages. Some examples will be presented below.

From a liberal point of view, one easily quantifiable indicator is budget development. Excessive administrative growth is an instance of mismanagement often criticized by liberals. A study carried out in 1978 evaluated data from the 110 largest Swiss cities to measure budget development. It showed that in cities with a more pronounced direct democracy, the budgets were more in line with the satisfaction of the population. In a period of 10 years, 1965 to 1975, the budget growth of the municipalities led by direct democracy amounted to 6.8 per cent. Contrastingly, the other municipalities grew by 9.6 per cent. That translates into a saving of 40% (Schneider, 1983).

Another positive feature of direct democracy seems to be tax morality. In a 2002 study, Feld and Frey demonstrated that the greater the say of citizens in a canton, the fewer taxes are evaded. This result suggests that citizens in a directly democratically governed canton are more satisfied with the public services offered, and this with a lower administrative budget for the canton. Therefore, it would follow that direct democracy leads to greater administrative efficiency (Feld, Frey, 2002). Higher satisfaction with the general living situation in cities governed by direct democracy was also proven by a study by Frey and Stutzer. This is probably due to the higher efficiency of public administration and the better performance of public services (Frey, Stutzer, 2000).

Finally, there are a wealth of studies showing the influence of direct democracy on economic performance. This has been evaluated between different cantons on the

basis of their GDP. In the period from 1984 to 1993, the data showed that cantons governed by direct democracy were able to generate 5 % more GDP per capita. The obvious assumption that causality goes in the opposite direction, and that more successful cantons tend towards more direct democracy, was also examined and could be ruled out (Feld, Savioz, 1997).

In conclusion, there are a wide variety of papers proving the benefits of direct democracy. In those areas deemed important for government's success, it turned out that direct democratic governed cantons achieved better results. Overall, the more say the population had in political matters, the happier they were.

Possibilities for direct democracy in the EU

Implementing direct democracy in the EU analogous to Switzerland would be an extensive and difficult undertaking. While Switzerland has many years of experience and history in giving the people a say, direct democracy at the transnational level is largely unexplored.

Switzerland has worked with instruments of direct democracy since 1618. In a letter from the monastery of Graubünden, this form of government is mentioned as an alternative to monarchy and aristocracy. The foundation stone for this was probably laid in the free communities governed by citizens, where the population could decide on the enactment of new laws (NZZ, 2002). These 400 years of experience have led to a pronounced understanding of democracy among the Swiss population.

With this responsibility came the commitment to deal with political issues and to make conscious decisions. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the Swiss vernacular says that dealing with political issues is a civic duty.

One consideration concerning the introduction of direct democracy in the European Union is that it would lead to discriminatory decisions. This is due to the Europeans' lack of experience with direct democracy. Any visitor to the UK will be repeatedly confronted with such concerns: the experience of the Brexit referendum, in particular, is often cited as a negative example. A step-by-step introduction to direct-democratic instruments would, therefore, be worth examining. Switzerland has a large number of democratic instruments and forms of them at its disposal, and these vary from municipality to municipality. However, the two most important forms are the popular initiative and the referendum. Through the popular initiative, the population can bindingly request the Swiss parliament to draw up law and through the referendum, a draft law of parliament can be rejected.

A strong proposal for a liberal vision of Europe would be to introduce the right of referendum at the European level. The instrument of referendum can be used to accustom European populations to direct-democratic instruments, without allowing the EU to enact discriminatory laws (which could be a risk if we chose to start by introducing the popular initiative). Instead, the right to referendum would lead to a decrease in the number of new laws and a more careful examination by the European Parliament of the draft laws. From a liberal point of view, this can only

be advocated. Since the European Parliament wants to prevent its laws from being rejected by the people, broader majorities are sought in Parliament and the laws are prepared more carefully. This would prevent any rushing forward against popular opinion, as it was the case with the copyright protection law.

The question arises as to the appropriate quorum of votes before a poll would have to take place. In Switzerland, a national referendum requires 50,000 Swiss voters, with a total number of voters of 5.4 million (Statistik, Bundesamt Für). However, this percentage can only be compared to a vote on a transnational level to a limited extent. The quorum for a European Citizens' Initiative (1 million) seems more suitable for this. Even though the European Citizens' Initiative is not a binding instrument, the size of its quorum seems suitable, as the referendum still needs a poll won afterwards in order to reject a law.

The opportunity for referendum would enable the European people to familiarise themselves with direct-democratic instruments and endow the European Union with the benefits of this form of government. The European Union could thus hope for a leaner administration, happier citizens and a successful economy.

Recommendations

To benefit from the direct democratic instruments and enable them to work in the European Union, the European Commission must put the right procedures in place and

therefore has to work on certain tasks. As the European Union already has experience in conducting transnational votes when voting for the European Parliament, many processes can be taken from that instrument. A major difference, however, is that before a vote can take place, a certain number of citizens must have given their signature to reach a certain quorum. To manage this process the following recommendations are made.

The EU Commission should decide on the possible dates of referenda for the coming years and how many slots there should be each year. A transnational vote is a very complex and elaborate undertaking. Carrying out such a vote needs some preparation and therefore the possible dates of votes need to be decided far in advance. That allows also the citizens and political parties to organize themselves with regard to the votes. In Switzerland, four slots per year have proven to be suitable.

After presenting a draft law, there has to be a binding period in which to gather the required signatures to allow the vote. The European Commission would need to decide how long this period should be and from which point that period is activated. In Switzerland, 180 days have proven to be suitable.

The number of signatures needed to allow a vote is a decision that needs to be made by the European Commission. This is key for the success of the new direct democratic instrument. If the quorum is too high, it will be too difficult to trigger a referendum. If it is too low, too many referendums will take place, possibly angering the

citizens and inflating the administration. As discussed above, the number of signatures required for the European Citizens' Initiative, and the geographical spread of countries, seem to be suitable.

Signatures need to be submitted somehow to the European Union institutions. The format in which the signatures have to be submitted has to be clear and publicly viewable. The European Commission would have to decide if the signatures can be submitted via lists and what information needs to be included on those lists.

After the signatures have been submitted, a European Union authority or one of the Member States will need to verify them. Similar to the European Parliament election procedures, it seems that Member States could be entrusted with verifying the signatures originating from their country. The Commission should indicate which authority should verify the signatures and how much time is reserved for that.

When the signatures are verified and the quorum has been reached, a vote has to take place. The same processes can be used as during the European Parliament elections. The EU must decide what kind of majority should be reached in order to declare the referendum won. Would more than 50% of all incoming votes be sufficient? Or would a qualified majority system be introduced, respecting geographical criteria?

To conclude, this form of referendum is feasible, and could serve to increase trust and engagement with the EU among European citizens. All that would be needed is the political will of the Member States, and the Commission's preparation of the formalities of how such an instrument would function.

Globalisation, Populism and the future of European democracy

Bjarni Janusson

The idea of democracy has been around for as long as western civilisation itself. Democracy is said to have been born in the city-state of Athens in ancient Greece, but further developed in Western Europe during the Enlightenment era. Despite being an inspiration for revolutionaries and the dominant driving force for change, it was somewhat unrestrained until being tempered and further moulded by liberal and utilitarian British philosophers. It suffices to say that liberal democratic thought laid the groundwork for modern-day Europe. Democratisation has been gradual and mostly successful since it was rediscovered by intellectual movements in Europe; it has come in waves since the 19th century, with the latest one starting in the late 20th century, although the diffusion has not been without problems (Huntington 1993).

Contemporary developments indicate that this recent wave of democratisation is coming to an end. The rise of xenophobic nationalism and right-wing populism in Europe and in the United States, as well as in other continents and countries of the world, does indeed pose a threat to liberal democratic society and its values. Furthermore, it seems that political polarisation has increased, as societies are now becoming more polarised than ever before in modern times, the exception being the early part of the 20th century during economic crises and

devastating warfare. It seems that public trust has eroded over the last decades as well. In this regard, academics have focused on the effects of globalisation, the argument being that it causes angst and fuels resentment within the western countries.

Economic and cultural globalisation

Some claim that the so-called losers of globalisation or modernisation – middle class or low-income groups within western countries – are first and foremost economically marginalised, which acts as the cause of their resentment. The claim is that economic globalization has affected these people by further increasing income inequality, causing wages to stagnate, and threatening job security. With business and trade becoming more globalised, western companies have increasingly relied on overseas outsourcing. They have relocated their offices and moved jobs offshore to third-world countries requiring lower wages to be paid to workers. In turn, labour costs have been significantly lowered for these companies, allowing them to make more profit on their sales and services (Krugman 2007).

Another factor that has been mentioned is the recent automatisisation of many labour processes, a result of modernisation. In that sense, these lower-skilled workers, i.e. the victims of globalisation, have become doubly victimised by having their jobs outsourced by automated production processes as well. Some economists believe that the effects of this can be seen in increasing support

for populism and protectionism (Milanovic 2016; Rodrik 2018).

There are, of course, also those that look beyond this pessimism and point out the positive benefits of globalisation; notably it has brought people together, made both trade and travel easier, and has increased economic growth (Firebaugh 1992). This economic progress has drastically reduced poverty in the world and has accelerated the rate of progress regarding every other aspect of human life (Pinker 2018). However, the latter point might be countered by the fact that we now face an immense environmental threat because of recent climate change. Recent economic developments are also somewhat responsible for the rise of the reactionary right-wing populism (Monbiot 2016). There is no contradiction in admitting these problems, in order to solve them, as well as accepting and embracing the positive effects of economic globalisation. This is however not merely an economic matter. Some academics, such as Ronald Inglehart, have made the case that the resentment seen among voters of populist and nationalist parties has just as much been an effect of recent cultural changes spread by the cultural globalisation. These voters are reacting to a society that has become multicultural, more diverse and more sympathetic towards marginalised groups. Western societies have been somewhat shaped by *post-materialism* as they have achieved economic and material security. The result is that they have now become more focused on identity issues and other post-material political issues (Inglehart 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

It is said that the support for right-wing populism has mainly increased because of the cultural backlash that is taking place within western societies. On one side are the progressive and liberal groups that support recent post-material changes in these societies, and on the other side are reactionary groups holding more conservative and nationalistic views, who simply want things to revert back to the way they were. The recent wave of support for populism is an effect of the second group protesting recent changes, and although they are fewer in number, they have an older demographic which is more likely to vote in elections (Norris and Inglehart 2018).

A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of populism

Populism has become the buzzword of the decade. The term is elastic, elusive and widely contested, and its use is almost never without dispute. Despite this, there is a general understanding of what populism is. First and foremost, it demands opposition to the established structure of society; instead it divides society into two groups – the honest people and the ruling elite. This established elite, purportedly, is corrupt and villainous, as well as being responsible for recent problems surrounding integration, immigration, inequality, and all other woes in society. The populists say that they themselves are the only viable alternative, that they are the only real representatives of the common people and that they alone will work for them to make society great again (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017).

The academic Jan-Werner Müller points out that populism is not only anti-establishment but anti-plural as well; the typical populist politician makes a moral claim about his opponents, seeks to delegitimise them from debate and excludes them from the democratic process. He does this because he claims that he alone can be trusted with upholding and satisfying the general will of the people. This leads to authoritarian tendencies, which undermine liberal democratic societies and pose a threat to democracy itself (Müller 2016). One needs to look no further than to Hungary or Poland to see how the populist ideology in action has undermined liberal democracy and civil society.

Populism nonetheless draws our attention to some important issues. Many people vote for populist parties simply because they feel that their voice is finally being heard by someone in the political sphere. They feel that politics has become more technocratic and less democratic, they feel that they have been left out in the globalised world of today, and they feel that the bureaucracy of the European Union has gone too far. It seems as if many people feel this way, evidenced by the fact that one in four Europeans vote for populist parties. It would simply be undemocratic not to address this need in some way.

The future of Europe

In conclusion, we might say that the populist movement gives dissatisfied voters a voice. This dissatisfaction is rooted in the feeling of not being properly represented

since these voters often feel ignored by politics; they are the so-called losers of globalisation and modernisation. The populist movement might ask the right questions, and one can take the problems they raise with serious thought without accepting the solutions they offer – or the ways in which they frame their problems. We might accept the critique of populists in some sense, without accepting their anti-plural agenda. To the problems they raise, we must find the appropriate solution, whether through reforms to representative democracy, less technocratic politics or something else.

The political leadership of the European Union must admit that neoliberal policies, such as austerity policies, have failed too many European citizens. They must acknowledge that globalised trade has increased income inequality and threatened job security, even if it has increased quality of life in a general sense. In addition to this, it must implement clear policies, taking a stand against populism, preventing further voter alienation and dissatisfaction with liberal democratic societies.

The liberal ideology is an ideology of individual autonomy and social equality. The liberal vision thus seeks to defend civil society, uphold the principles of equality and fairness, as well as ensure individual sovereignty and liberty. The liberal response should aim to increase transparency within political processes and communicate liberal narratives clearly and concisely. The liberal response must defend the rule of law, a fundamental aspect of a liberal civil society, bringing cases more frequently before the Court of Justice and

further reinforcing the Venice Commission, as well as penalising and restricting access to funds whenever countries have been found to seriously undermine the rule of law.

We should not underestimate the foundational strength which liberal democracy itself relies upon, but nor should we make little of the fact that it is indeed threatened by hostile forces, such as the quasi-authoritarian populist movement that has ascended through the ranks of the reactionary right. If the social contract of liberal democracy and pluralism is to survive in Europe, if democracy itself is to survive in Europe, the issues raised by the populist movement need to be addressed in an appropriate way, and without conflicting with the core values of liberalism.

Reinventing Europe: Liberal Solutions

Yana Humen

The solutions to current challenges as well as the clue to the sustainable European integration lie in the hands of progressive liberals. The EU's leaders should be guided by the principle of "common solutions for common concerns". At the same time, at all policy levels, the EU must protect its citizens' freedoms without limiting them.

When deliberating on the future, one may take the following words by Jean Monnet as an inspiration: "Europe has never existed. One must genuinely create Europe" (Knowles 2007, p.226). Today, many argue that the EU is facing crises on many levels, which undermines the value of European project both in the eyes of its citizens and the world. Nevertheless, a crisis can also be an opportunity for re-creating a stronger – and a more united – Europe. What it needs today is a progressive liberal engine to provide a strong impetus for a renewed vision of European integration. The EU must establish efficient, citizen-oriented policy-making processes, comprehensive and united external action, as well as stable democracy and a common identity.

Europe that delivers

To begin with, the EU needs to redesign its approach to many policy areas – from the common market to migration – to make its citizens perceive the real benefits of integration. This certainly requires political will and

action in the spirit of common reform. Certainly, it has always been the liberals who were the change-makers in the Union, and their ideas lie at the core of the European project. However, one must admit that liberalism has its shortcomings – and they have been exploited by populists across Europe.

In order to tackle these and other challenges, liberals must advocate a new progressive policy agenda, in areas such as combating tax fraud and tax evasion. Moreover, the liberals must push the EU to use its political and legislative potential to provide the first complex legislative framework for online spaces and to become the first climate-neutral economy in the world.

The current lack of consensus on a long-term common migration policy primarily undermines the freedom of movement – one of the most notable benefits the EU has provided to its citizens. Thus, an effective Common European Asylum System should be a priority. The EU should be open to qualified workers from third countries – in which the EU-wide work permits mentioned in the ALDE Manifesto (2018, p.5) would be a decisive step forward. Additionally, more grants have to be introduced for young non-EU professionals willing to gain experience in the EU institutions.

European leaders must focus on security, defence and resilience, addressing both kinetic and non-kinetic threats (such as cyber and informational warfare) to their societies. A more security-sensitive approach must be adopted in energy policies. Building the resilience of institutions and societies should be a priority, as they are

the cornerstones of democracy and thus become the primary targets of the hybrid warfare. Unlike NATO, the EU is not a military alliance. However, its political capital makes it a potentially more efficient player in countering those unconventional threats.

The EU, its neighbours and the world

The role of the EU as a global actor largely depends on its normative power. As argued by Ian Manners, this derives not merely from the reality of sharing common values, but rather from the capacity of the EU to diffuse them (Manners 2015). This is mainly realised through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

The ENP as revised in 2015 (High Representative 2015) and the 2016 EU Global Strategy (High Representative 2016) demonstrated the EU's pragmatic approach with regards to its neighbours. However, the so-called "principled pragmatism" (Juncos 2017) should not fully replace the EU's role as a normative power. It is still important to promote democratic values and stability in neighbouring countries. The EU must become surrounded by a "ring of friends" again (Prodi, 2002). For instance, clearer integration benchmarks and more local ownership must be introduced for Eastern Partnership countries.

Additionally, a more strategic approach must be articulated with relation to countries in Southeastern Europe that have membership aspirations. While China is heavily investing in business and infrastructure in the region, the EU's financial aid is mainly focused on "soft"

reforms (Holzner & Schwarzhappe, 2018). The EU must engage more – and more strategically – in the Western Balkans. On the one hand, the EU’s soft power remains its only strong leverage in comparison to the hard power tools exploited by other actors in the EU’s neighbourhood. On the other hand, the ENP and the actions in the Western Balkans have in fact become a reflection the EU itself, when it comes to the efficiency of its decision- and and policy-making. Even though many of its neighbours have no prospect of membership, a sophisticated level of market and regulatory integration has brought these countries into the EU’s orbit.

In the global arena, the EU must act as a vanguard of multilateralism and fair trade against protectionist tendencies. A comprehensive and coherent cooperation must be introduced with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

As key foreign policy decisions are still made by the heads of Member States, the EU should strive for a reaffirmed role of the High Representative to make its voice more coherent. Apart from this, foreign and security policy is a priority area in which the use of qualified majority voting should be considered.

Reinventing European democracy

The discussion about the EU’s democracy and democratic deficit has always been determined by a strong confusion. For some, a “more democratic EU” implies a stronger role for its institutions and a more direct voice for the EU's

citizens over the decision-making process on the community level. For others, it means in reverse a stronger mandate for national parliaments and fewer competences given to the EU. The concept of European democracy thus lacks one common definition.

It is also important to protect the EU's democracies from external interference and to safeguard electoral processes. Among many proposals for action, French President Emmanuel Macron put forward the establishment of the "European Agency for the Protection of Democracies", Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker introduced the "Action Plan Against Disinformation", while Ursula von der Leyen proposed "a joint approach and common standards" to tackle disinformation and hate speech (von der Leyen 2019, p.21). However, these ideas need to be mobilised and transformed into one common strategy instead of being merely political declarations. The issue of harmful online content should be treated by EU leaders in complex cooperation with the private sector and NGOs in the spirit of shared responsibility.

In a liberal democracy, the rights of all social, religious and ethnic groups must be defended to prevent potential conflicts and make all citizens feel safe. Tolerance is thus an important element of a stable and prosperous democratic society. Through cross-border cooperation, the Union should promote fairer treatment of discriminated groups and ensure their political participation. A better representation of women in politics and business should be a priority as well.

A functional European democracy needs to engage European citizens. The Treaties' potential must be used to strengthen the European Parliament's power to initiate legislation. When discussing the Conference on the Future of Europe, it is important to ensure the due participation of citizens in setting the agenda for the future shape of the Union. Direct means for democratic participation on the EU level should be considered. However, this will only come with a strong European identity.

Common identity: Bridging East and West

The European project means different things in each Member State today. One may observe a *de facto* ideological confrontation between different visions of Europe—one of sovereign states and one that delivers policies at the European level. While the ideological divide between East and West are growing today, liberal politicians must propose a progressive consensus.

Strengthening the idea and understanding of Europe and the EU in public discourse should be a primary focus. This could be done *inter alia* through simulations of EU institutions and decision-making procedures. In addition to this, common values must be reaffirmed, proved to be universal, and must not become subject to interpretation. First, investment in innovation and an effective cohesion policy providing visible benefits to citizens could contribute to decreasing ideological differences across different EU regions. Second, a political consensus must be achieved regarding the preferred scenario for the future of the European Union. Emmanuel Macron may have big

ideas for Europe. Yet unless these ideas find support across all EU member states, they will remain merely a political declaration.

Recommendations

First, today, populists exploit themes like migration and social security to incite fear among European citizens. Liberals must reinvent those themes, proposing a stronger and more united Europe as a solution to common concerns.

Second, as a one-of-a-kind entity, the EU must use its political capital to be at the forefront of policy action amid the newly emerging challenges. Issues like climate change, digitalisation and hybrid warfare need common action at the community level.

Third, the EU must reaffirm its normative power and demonstrate more strategic engagement with its neighbourhood. A stronger role for the High Representative and the introduction of the qualified majority rule for foreign policy issues would allow the EU to be a more solid and efficient international actor.

Fourth, there should be a common understanding as to what the European democracy is. Additionally, a concrete and coherent strategy must be introduced to safeguard electoral processes and to increase citizens' engagement. Using the potential of the Treaties, a stronger role must be given to the European Parliament.

Fifth, the East-West ideological divide must be tackled through reaffirming common values. Apart from this, minimising economic differences among different EU member states and establishing a solid political consensus regarding the future direction of integration will help to bridge ideological differences across the EU.

Alluding to the words of Jean Monnet, Europe does exist today. However, more and more often one hears that the EU in its current shape fails to face challenges and meet the expectations of its citizens. Thus, it is the liberals' task to reinvent Europe, give it a new momentum and make it deliver.

The Future of the European Union - the Case for Institutional Reforms

Danica Vihinen

One of the most frequently used metaphors regarding the European Union over the past years is that the EU is at a crossroads. This is inevitably true, the question is which way to go from here. The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, presented the Commission's view on the matter in the White Paper on the Future of the European Union of 1 March 2017. In the white paper the Commission president outlined 5 possible scenarios: "carrying on," "nothing but the single market," "those who want more do more," "doing less more efficiently," and "doing much more together" (European Commission, 2017)

The first scenario envisages the EU27 upholding the status quo, while the second paints the picture of a union that gradually re-centers its focus on the single market. The third scenario sees the EU allowing willing member states to further develop their cooperation in specific areas, without the need for all 27 member states to partake. The fourth scenario is one where the union focuses on delivering more efficiently in certain policy areas while doing less in others. The final, fifth scenario is about the EU27 deciding to share more power, resources and decision-making in all areas (ibid).

This essay will argue that the fifth scenario is not only the best, but essentially the only option at hand if we want to move the union further while simultaneously getting it closer to the citizens. The multiple crises the EU has faced over the past several years has made it clear that the status quo is not a viable option, while the issues we're faced with are also too big for any member state to tackle alone. The third option, "those who want more do more", is first of all more or less already possible under the provisions of enhanced cooperation (EUR-Lex). More importantly, however, it comes with a great risk of creating a two-tier Europe of first and second class citizens, where only the rights of citizens of member states that opt in for closer cooperation are protected in certain areas (European Commission, 2017), which is why it is not preferable.

The possible downside of the fifth scenario, as outlined in the white paper, is that it risks creating a divide between the institutions, on the one hand, and parts of society that might feel that too much power is being concentrated to the EU or that the institutions lack legitimacy on the other hand (ibid). In order to avoid a legitimacy deficit several institutional reforms will be needed, in order to develop more transparent decision making and enhance the democracy and efficiency of the European institutions. Some of these reforms are already possible under the current treaties, while others would require treaty reform, something that several EU heads of state have rejected as an option - in his Future of Europe debate speech to the European Parliament in May 2018 the Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel even said it would "be counterproductive" at this moment (EPRS, 2019). On the

other hand, in her political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024 Ursula von der Leyen, candidate for President of the European Commission, stated that she is “open to Treaty change” (von der Leyen, 2019).

In my opinion the needed reforms include moving away from the unanimity rule in Council in favour of qualified majority voting (QMV), reducing the size of the European Commission in order for it to better function as a true executive body, and granting the right to legislative initiative for the European Parliament.

Regarding the unanimity rule, the current treaties already allows for the use of QMV in certain policy areas, as outlined in the European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2017 on improving the functioning of the European Union building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty (European Parliament, 2017), especially by making use of the “passerelle clause” outlined in Article 48(7) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) (EUR-Lex, 2012). The passerelle clause allows for the Council to deviate from the legislative procedure provided for by the treaties, including replacing the unanimity rule by QMV in a given policy area. The decision to do so must, however, be adopted unanimously (EUR-Lex). As the inability to find common ground among all member states in policy areas such as creating a common European asylum system or triggering Article 7 TEU have shown, a move towards more QMV could break some deadlocks in Council and hence make the decision-making process more efficient.

By reducing the number of commissioners in the European Commission the portfolios would become more concentrated, hence making the work more efficient. The European Parliament, in its resolution of 13 February 2019 on the state of the debate on the future of Europe, points out that “*there are different options to render the Commission more agile by adapting the structure and working methods of the College of Commissioners, for example with the appointment of Vice-Presidents responsible for a cluster of policies or the appointment of senior and junior Commissioners*”(European Parliament, 2019). These options could well be a possible first step towards a smaller, more efficient Commission.

The third institutional reform that would be needed is the right for the European Parliament to initiate legislation. As the only directly elected institution, and hence the voice of the European citizens, the European Parliament should be able to propose legislation alongside the Commission - a view that is shared by Ursula von der Leyen in her *Political Guidelines* (von der Leyen, 2019). A first step towards this, which is already possible under the current treaties, would be to make better use of legislative initiative reports as outlined in Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (EUR-Lex, 2012). Article 225 basically gives the right to the European Parliament to request the Commission to put forward legislative proposals in a certain policy area, if approved by a majority in the Parliament. The Commission is not obliged to act upon the request, but does have to give the reasons for a

possible refusal. In her *Political Guidelines* Ursula von der Leyen however commits to responding to requests by the Parliament by legislative acts (von der Leyen, 2019), a promise that can be seen as a short-term workaround until proper legislative powers could be granted by changing the treaties.

In order for the European Union to improve the efficiency of the decision-making, on one hand, and enhance its image towards the citizens, on the other, the above-mentioned reforms should be implemented as soon as possible. As I have outlined, many first steps are possible already under the existing treaties, but in the long run treaty change is, in my view, inevitable if we want to be able to create a European Union that is “doing much more together”.

CONCLUSION

This publication is the result of an ELF seminar that brought together young liberals from all over Europe in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina end of July 2019. This two-day event in the heart of the Western Balkans was a great opportunity for the participants to reflect together on the future of the EU and bring their own perspective in the debate. Their contributions therefore bring together a rich mix of knowledge and experiences that tells a lot about Europe's stories, past and current.

Their liberal perspectives reinforce our hope in a bright future and their innovative ideas contribute to paving the way following the European Elections that took place earlier in 2019.

The aim of this publication is to bring young Europeans' visions of Europe to a broad set of actors. On the one hand, it seeks to spread these "visions" among the younger members of our society and especially in the LYMEC network of young liberals. On the other hand, it targets politicians and representatives at all levels- local, regional, national- but especially European. This work can also be of interest to other actors in the ELF network.

This ELF publication is a call for action from young liberals to their fellow politicians to shape a brighter future together for the next generations.

The essays present new ideas and concrete steps towards a liberal Europe: direct democracy, subsidiarity, enlargement, qualified majority, reform of the treaties ... many of these concepts will shape the discussions in the coming months. As a matter of fact, these echo many of LYMEC's core proposals such as institutional reforms, the crucial role of the Western Balkans and the importance of fighting climate change at the level of our Union. In this publication our young liberals proved that they are ready to feed decision-makers with their proposals!

On behalf of our organisation, I would like to thank the European Liberal Forum for giving our authors a chance to share their ideas and outline their visions of a liberal Europe.

I hope you enjoyed the essays and made your own choice!

Bàlint Gyévai

Secretary General of LYMEC

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