

COMMENTARY: THE ROME SUMMIT

Experts from EUROPEUM react to the signed Rome Declaration



Vladimír Bartovic | Multi-speed Europe – the only way forward

Last Saturday, representatives of 27 EU member states (without the United Kingdom) chose the path that European integration should take from now on. Only one of the five different scenarios presented by the Commission earlier in March can, at least partly, satisfy the needs of both the supporters and objectors of further integration: the concept of multi-speed Europe.

This scenario will enable closer collaboration in several areas for those willing to do so, and at the same time will not force the others to share this perspective. It is not the first time that such scenario was put forward – as the existence of both the Schengen and euro projects prove – but for the first time it has become the preferred way for future integration. The Czech Republic was initially rather hesitant to agree to such a plan, fearing both a possible division of member states into two categories,

which would be harmful to its interests, and also being automatically sorted into the category of countries having to eventually catch up due to the Czech meagre interest in pursuing further integration.

After the 2009 'great leap forward' for European integration in the form of the Lisbon Treaty, it has become now almost impossible for member states to agree on any further major step in terms of integration. And even in case of a miraculous agreement, the stakes are so high that such plan would collapse due to the citizens' current state of mind, should it take the form of a popular referendum.

Therefore, in the current situation, a multi-speed Europe indeed seems like the only way to move forward. There are, however,

some conditions to be met for its success in Europe and benefit of the Czech Republic: no European country shall be denied accession to the higher category (even in the case of later entry), and no member state can be discriminated should it decide not to implement the concept. Also, all integration projects need to be carried out within the legal boundaries of the Union, not by individual treaties in which the conditions mentioned above would not be guaranteed.

In signing the Declaration, the Czech Republic clearly agreed to accept and support the concept of multi-speed Europe as the right path towards future integration. Therefore, the next couple of years will likely be filled with discussions and debates regarding the opportunity to access the higher echelon of integration from the get-go, and if so, in which areas.

Martin Michelot | What leadership does the Czech Republic want to exercise?

The European leaders left Rome agreeing on a ten-year plan for Europe, one that would take the EU to the 100th anniversary, as Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker suggested. The four points to be implemented to reach this new milestone include a safe and secure Europe, a prosperous and sustainable Europe, a social Europe, and a stronger Europe on the global scene.

The parallel advent of the multi-speed Europe, as criticized as it may have been by Central European countries, represents a reality that future developments will have to be built upon. Today, before general elections where the result seems to be pre-written, the Czech Republic and its political leaders have a responsibility to identify areas where it can exercise leadership and ensure that its interests are defended. Prague will host on June 9 a summit dedicated to reinforcing the security and defense union, in what represents a key opportunity for the country to highlight how it contributes to security concerns all over the world. Economic prosperity and security should go hand-in-hand with an even greater participation in security missions around the world: the CR has built itself this margin of maneuver which it should use as a lever to exert its influence and priorities in a stronger EU.

In a second time, political leaders, who have taken a liking to criticizing other countries – France, Netherlands, Italy – for the populist waves they are going through, and congratulate how the CR is immune to them, should have the decency to realize that they are partly borne from the easy criticism of the EU. In this context, Minister Zaoralek's comments on the free movement of workers from last week inspire little good towards an appeased relationship between Czech leaders and the EU. For a minister who has participated, in the last four years, in building up a more safe, secure, and stronger global Europe, the comments struck a chord that European construction was merely an afterthought.

In fact, the core values of the EU - open borders, the free circulation of goods, capital, services and especially people – remain more than ever the guarantor of economic prosperity of the CR and its citizens. Political leaders therefore have a responsibility, this fall, to explain how the conditions of citizens, even including basic issues such as salaries, can be improved thanks to the umbrella the EU provides. Painting the CR as a leader on the security agenda, by far the citizens' most pressing concern, will help in this process.

Tereza Novotná | The Rome Declaration and the New Global Order

Although a show of unity in the face of an internal turmoil within the EU, that is an unprecedented decision of the United Kingdom to leave the Union, has been the primary impetus for the Rome Declaration of 25 March 2017, the Declaration to some extent represents a European response to a wider challenge: the changing new world order. 60 years after signing the original Treaty of Rome, it is clear that the EU can no longer depend on its old alliances and partners. This holds true not only for the

UK that has just triggered the Article 50 to "Brexit" the EU, but also for the long-term guarantor of peace and prosperity in Europe: the United States.

When the original Treaty of Rome was signed by six founding members in 1957, the Cold War order was clear: the world was split between the democratic West led by the US and the totalitarian East controlled by the Soviet Union. As Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, reminded in

his speech at the signing ceremony in Rome, that really was a two-speed Europe. Yet in 2017, in the age of "fake news" politics and populist rhetorics and practices on all sides of the political spectrum in Europe and across the Atlantic, the boundaries between the truth and lies, mainstream and fringes, friends and rivals are becoming much more blurred. When Donald Trump, the new US President, advocates economic protectionism and bilateralism, including with individual European countries rather than with the EU as a whole, that would benefit "America First" and insists on NATO members paying their "debts" before guaranteeing any security umbrella, while Xi Jinping, the Chinese President, talks about free trade, multilateralism and EU-China cooperation on climate change, it is clear that the global political environment in which the EU will operate within the next decade has been significantly reshuffled.

The Rome Declaration alludes to some of these challenges and the EU's strategy to tackle them. It emphasizes the EU's commitment to "developing existing partnerships, building new

ones", "standing for a rules-based multilateral system" and "promoting free and fair trade and a positive global climate policy". Most of all, the Rome Declaration rightly points out that taken individually, EU Member States would be sidelined by worldwide developments and that "unity is both necessity and free choice." From the global perspective, the key task for the next years is to make sure that the remaining 27 national leaders "walk the talk" and stand together, particularly since they can no longer rely on the United States to do some of their work for them. However, ensuring that the Rome Declaration becomes more than another sheet of paper also requires a bottom-up support by the European citizens to appreciate the merits of European integration at home and abroad. As the pro-EU marches in European capitals from Berlin through Zagreb to Brussels on the same day as the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome have shown, there are some positive signs emerging that, as much as policy-makers, the European publics have started renewing their marriages vows to the European project as well.

Zuzana Stuchlíková | #EU60 and the narrative of European integration

The Rome declaration represents the outcome of 6 months of the „Bratislava process“, a brainstorming and discussion process about possible scenarios for the future of the EU following the result of the British referendum.

The British referendum was not the only blow that the narrative of a united Europe had to face recently, but it was the proverbial last straw that forced EU leaders to engage in deeper reflection. The long-term increase of both populism and far-right extremism suggest that the permissive consensus on the European integration can no longer be taken for granted even in traditionally pro-European member states. The post-war narrative of European community as a symbol of cooperation and guarantor of peace is being jeopardized by the changing nature of threats and disappearing differences between internal and external security. The second successful narrative, about European economic integration, lost a lot of its appeal due to the economic and financial crisis, from which Europe is still only slowly recovering. As a result, the EU faces both accusations of not being efficient enough because of the lengthy negotiations, and of lacking the democratic connection between the EU level decision-making and its citizens. A call for a new vision that would bring the project closer to European citizens of the 21st century is therefore not so surprising.

The Rome declaration, however, does not contribute all too much to a renewed narrative of EU integration. Although it mentions a social and global Europe as priority sectors besides the

traditional economic and still more topical security cooperation, it is nothing revolutionary given the recent developments. The fact that the social and global dimensions of the EU are not as developed has little to do with the lack of impulses but more with the willingness of the member states themselves. The Declaration includes references to post war values such as peace, democratic rights and the rule of law, and also mentions the aspect of enlargement as a symbol of transition from various dictatorships to democracy. The integrity of the Union is also mentioned as a value. This way, European leaders sent out a signal that the EU doesn't need a new narrative since the original need to face new challenges together and minimize the risks of nationalism remains painfully present. Calling for a new start follows a line similar to populist offers of quick solutions, but as usual, the reality is far more complicated. It will take concrete and measurable outcomes to renew the trust of the citizens.

In that aspect, we can only hope that the proclaimed commitment of the EU27 leaders to deliver will not remain on paper this time, and that the upcoming Brexit will serve as a sufficient warning of the dangers that befall Europe if there is no course correction. The text of the declaration itself was made general enough to secure even the signatures of Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło and Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, who also put aside their previous reservations. In the context of the past years, this shows that the one of the main problems of the European narrative is not the lack of a vision, but certain politicians undermining it from its core.

Alexandr Lagazzi | An Opportunity for Czech Leadership in Security and Defence?

The first point of the Declaration calls for a *'safe and secure Europe'*, one on which its external borders are secured, and determined to fight terrorism and organized crime. There is of course a certain amount of challenges EU27 leaders should not forget about while striving for common solutions of these *'unprecedented challenges'*. As seen in the last two years, the east-west split over immigration policies, topped with the Polish threat not to sign the declaration echoed the stances of the V4 group towards such common European grounds, a position also reflected in the drafting process of the declaration's.

However, the Czech Republic's signature, apart from symbolically reinvigorating 60-year-old hopes, was dubbed by its political elite as enhanced cooperation in defence policy. Such vision might perhaps bring honour to the pledge: the Czech Republic could be able to swing Central and Eastern Europe votes into agreeing on a proposed *'ever closer Union'* scenario, should its political leaders properly communicate and ensure – while translating the broad goals of the declaration into actual policy – that the Union's *open* borders from the 50th birthday declaration will remain so internally whilst external borders shall become *secured* as pledged by the 60th birthday document. In order to prove that the European Union is indeed the best instrument to achieve such ends, the Czech Republic's position on defence policy needs to clearly push for a common agreement that would suit its regional neighbours at first, and then take into account the stances and demands of other member states – primarily

in the South. Doing so will require (re)shaping such policy towards solidarity, but especially offering a clear and concrete vision – unlike the mere hints shown during the Slovak V4 presidency.

On the other hand, if by *'responding to the concerns raised by its citizens'* the Czech Republic would choose to continue blocking refugees' reallocation initiatives and turning its back to the countries most affected by the Mediterranean inflow, it is certain that its negotiating position would be heavily discredited (not only) in the eyes of countries like Italy and Greece. Moreover, given the political ambiguity in Prague concerning a future European army (an idea floated by the Prime Minister speech only to be then rectified by the Minister of Defence), combined with its stagnating domestic defence spending despite promises to the contrary and healthy economic indicators, the Czech Republic needs to suitably rethink its position as part of both V4 and the EU. However, in pledging to fulfil the Rome Declaration by means of defence and security policy, the Czech Republic should distance itself from the V4 shadowy position and finally present a clear stance – one that would strive for unity of the EU and promote solidarity in achieving its common scope. After all, in the wake of its own leadership example from the Brexit negotiations, the Czech Republic has proved to have both the capacity to properly use and heavily benefit from such an opportunity. The question remains, again, in the willingness of the ruling elites to take such responsibility.