

EU MONITOR

The Future of Europe *under construction*

Analysis of the first nine speeches of members of the European Council in the framework debate *on the Future of Europe* in the European Parliament, January – September 2018

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- The ongoing debate on the future of European integration is a rolling stone. It lasts and evolves since the very early stages of the integration process decades ago. In the past, there were various cleavages between member states that were – more or less – useful in understanding the debate.
- There were the wealthier states and the poorer nations, the net contributors and the cohesion states, the free market economies and socially protective economies. There were the new member states who argued for solidarity and the Scandinavian states who argued for transparency. There were those who argued for deeper integration, and those who were happy with the status quo. There were sound economies and troubled ones. There was important unemployment in some states and shortages of workers elsewhere. All those differentiations were reconsidered with the exit of the United Kingdom from the Union.



Introduction

There were the wealthier states and the poorer nations, the net contributors and the cohesion states, the free market economies and socially protective economies. There were the new member states who argued for solidarity and the Scandinavian states who argued for transparency. There were those who argued for deeper integration, and those who were happy with the status quo. There were sound economies and troubled ones. There was important unemployment in some states and shortages of workers elsewhere. All those differentiations were reconsidered with the exit of the United Kingdom from the Union.

This is why there is the need for a renewed debate on the future of Europe. Since the 2016 Brexit referendum new cleavages have arisen, old conflicts subsided, new challenges appeared and new alliances formed. To name just a few of those new fault lines: the gravity and substantiality of the European values; the new openings in policies Britain blocked for years, such as defence and social policy; and the new realities creating a real-life need for responses that can only be European, if they were to be successful at all, just as asylum, migration, border control and others.

Yet the objective policy openings cannot always materialise in societies, which are more tired and afraid. The social perception and the public mood have changed. There is no more road to business as usual. There is no return to the pre-crisis realities. There is room for something new. What should it be?

The Run-Up to the Debate

The current context of the debate has been framed by a number of events in recent years. First, the post-Brexit referendum reality, in which negotiations the EU is negotiating terms of a loose-loose agreement. Second, a series of devastating socio-economic and migratory crises in Europe has taken a significant toll on the mood of European societies. Third, a number of terrorist attacks on European soil in recent years further contributed to an

increase of public fear, and potentially – to a new trend of closing in of societies.

Against this grim picture, members of the European Council have been laying out their individual (or collectively) perspectives on the political fate of Europe. A few important political declarations were adopted: the Bratislava Declaration (2016) was a reconfirmation of a unity of EU-27 in the aftermath of the Brexit vote; the Rome Declaration (2017) was an interesting attempt to relaunch the discussion on the future and the European Pillar of Social Rights (known also as the Gothenburg Declaration, 2017) takes it further. In parallel, there has been an important inter-institutional activity and reflection on the topic. The first joint (the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission working together) view on things has been published in 2012 as the so-called Four Presidents Report (van Rompuy, Barroso, and Juncker of Eurozone and Draghi of the ECB). It followed by the Five Presidents Report in 2015 (Juncker, Tusk, and Dijsselbloem of Eurozone, Draghi of the ECB and Schulz of the Parliament) on the same topic.

All those developments lead to the current debate. In 2017 two actors, the European Commission and newly elected French President Emmanuel Macron, called for a new, in-depth reflection and debate about the future of the European Union. The Commission presented its five scenarios, while the French President proposed to organize a number of democratic conventions to debate the future of European Union with its citizens.

The specific political atmosphere in Europe in the first half of 2017 was very pessimistic. In 2015 and 2016 there were five referenda organized on five different topics in five countries. Each vote had a local specific context, but all were related to the European integration in one way or the other, and they all ended with a similar, negative, result. The Greeks rejected conditionality attached to the financial assistance; the Danes were asked to remove some of the country's opt-outs from the justice and home affairs area; the Dutch voted down the EU-Ukraine deep and comprehensive free trade agreement. Then the British had their Brexit vote. The fifth was a Hungarian referendum manifesting the Budapest government's and local

population opposition to the mandatory migrants quota. The election of Macron, whose opponent in the second round of presidential elections argued for Frexit (French exit from the EU), was met with deep relief throughout a majority of capitals.

This served as background for the European Parliament attempt to regain the lead in the debate on the future of Europe. At its plenary sittings the Parliament adopted three resolutions on how to reform the Union within the existing legal framework, on issues that would require treaty change and about the fiscal capacities of the Eurozone. Since the beginning of 2018 members of the European Council are invited to address the MEPs in the Strasbourg hemicycle to debate the future of Europe. Until end of September nine members took the floor. Thus far the leaders of Ireland, Croatia, Portugal, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland and Greece presented their perspectives, while the leaders of Estonia, Romania, Germany, Denmark and Spain are expected to lay their visions until the end of 2018.

This analysis shall focus on the nine perspectives already presented in the European Parliament looking for their compatibility with one another as well as with the European Commission's scenarios. In the first phase we shall look at their understanding of the status quo of the Union, before we look into the proposed solutions.

ambitious ones (from the Brussels' perspective, that is) to the scenarios implying narrowing the integration.

The Commission's Scenarios

In March 2017 the European Commission has published its White Paper on the Future of Europe. In it there are five general scenarios. The scenarios are theoretical and serve as points of reference for a wider discussion. The Commission's analysis refers to six themes: (1) the single market and trade; (2) the economic and monetary union (EMU); (3) the Schengen area, migrations, security; (4) foreign policy and defence; (5) the EU budget; (6) the EU's capacity to deliver. Depending on the scenario there is a different set of problems, solutions to them and configurations among European nations. In the table below we present the Commission's scenarios from the most

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Scenario	Single market and trade	EMU	Schengen, migration and security	Foreign policy, defence	EU budget	Capacity to deliver
Pioneers	Enhanced single market , incl. energy and digital technologies, trade agreements	<i>Continuation</i> + enhanced cooperation: tax cooperation and social standards	<i>Continuation</i> + enhanced cooperation: security and justice	<i>Continuation</i> + enhanced cooperation: defence, military coordination, equipment	<i>Continuation</i> + additional budgets in areas of mutual activity of a group of states	<i>Continuation</i> + decision making process (DMP) more and more complicated
Ambitious		Introduction of the economic, monetary and fiscal union as foreseen in 2015	Border management, asylum policy and fight against terrorism	Progress in the foreign affairs; closer cooperation in defence , creation of the European Defence Union	Budget: bigger and modernised ; own resources ; budgetary stabilisation in the Eurozone	Faster decisions , execution more effective , questions on accountability
Continuation		Gradual progress in the Eurozone	Cooperation in external border management ; new asylum system ; improvement in security cooperation , incl. fight against terrorism		Budget partially changed reflecting EU-27 agreed reforms	Complex DMP; mismatch between expectations and capacity to act
Less is more, but effectively	Joint standards limited, but improved execution + trade agreements	Strengthening of the Eurozone ; less in employment and social policies			Budget modified and aligned with new priorities	What is a „priority“ ; DMP clearer
Only single market	Single market of goods and capital ; various standards ; free movement of people and services limited	Limited cooperation in the Eurozone	No migration and asylum policy; bilateral cooperation in security ; internal border controls reintroduced	Bilateral approach in many foreign affairs issues; defence cooperation kept at current levels	Budget: change to finance the single market	DMP simplified but joint action limited; issues of mutual interest addressed bilaterally

Even a superficial analysis of the Commission scenarios leads to the conclusion that this is a theoretical sketch. The scenarios are not mutually exclusive. The real objective is not to choose between the scenarios, but to clearly showcase the alternatives laid in front of the decision makers and the general public. By using this theoretical, or even simplistic model, the Commission has instigated some academic criticism, but at the same time, initiated a sustained public debate.

It is clear that the Commission would prefer the *ambitious* scenario – to do much more among all 27 participating nations. However this might be too ambitious and not feasible due to a great socio-political diversity among EU members. What for one is a *diversity* is a *division* for another. In other words: it seems that there might be too little convergence or no willingness among certain countries to make a major step forward among EU-27. If this was the case, than the *continuation* scenario would probably be the most probable option. In a way, a compromise between *ambition* and *continuation* is to legitimise a closer (enhanced) cooperation between a group (or groups) of selected states. What seems to be the most innovative approach of the Commission is this: to allow for the creation of policy incubators of the initial pioneer groups. Such groups of states would be limited by EU law, but only in such a way that within the EU competences they would be organised within the scope of the *enhanced cooperation*, and outside of the EU powers – it could still take place nevertheless.

The French *entrée*

Le temps où la France propose est revenu
 Emmanuel Macron 2017

On election night, the newly elected President of France Emmanuel Macron entered into the French political arena accompanied by the Ode to Joy, Beethoven's European anthem. This sent a strong message to the French public and across the continent. This was a new beginning, that of *la France qui propose*. President Macron laid out his proposals a few months later in his Sorbonne speech,

launching a new initiative for Europe – “A sovereign, united, democratic Europe”. He called for other leaders to answer to his ideas and contribute to the debate. In the “sovereign Europe” Macron calls for guaranteeing every aspect of security of Europeans, for building common defence, joint fight against fears and threats of terrorism, making a strong migration and asylum policy, developing European border guards force as well as assistance to Africa and the Mediterranean. He called for Europe to be a shining example for the world in leading in sustainable development, ecological transition and balancing the digital transformation between the respect for individual freedoms and regulation of the innovation. The last element of the new European sovereignty is related to its economic and monetary powers, that calls for – in Macron's eyes – a separate Eurozone budget.

The “united” adjective relates to improved social and tax convergence between European countries. President Macron envisages a European minimal salary, creating the European universities and multilingual European youth. The “democratic” side focuses on Macron's support for the transnational electoral lists proposed for the European Parliament elections and a series of democratic conventions to be organised around Europe. Finally, the new French leader supports “differentiation through ambition”: “those who want to go further and faster need to be able to do so unhindered. Cooperation will always be open to all”. Such a *differentiated* Europe shall also be open to EU enlargement to the Western Balkans.

Diagnosis of the *status quo* by (some) members of the European Council

Between January and September 2018 nine members of the European Council spoke on the topic of the future of Europe. Those presentations were largely positively received; some nevertheless triggered frictions. During those nine months three major events took place having impact on the evolving context of the debate. First, the Italian parliamentary elections showed the relevance of a problem mentioned by almost all the speakers: the political

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populism, rise of Euroscepticism and nationalistic forces. Second, the Commission's proposal on the multiannual financial framework after 2020 also was reflected in the debates: anticipating at first, referring to the proposals later. Third, there were new problems in the transatlantic relationship with the introduction of American sanctions on steel and aluminium from the EU – those, too, were reflected in the later speeches.

The nine leaders were almost in full agreement that among the premises for the current debate on the future of Europe are mostly fears (sometimes viewed as challenged) related to (1) digital transition; (2) massive, unregulated migration; (3) climate change and natural disasters. A number of topics fall under a general theme of (4) security, including personal safety, terrorist threats, and digital attacks. Five speeches referred to the threats for (5) the current multilateral world system by linking problems to the deteriorating EU-US relations. A few leaders spoke about global shifts in a more general context. The following three issues were also frequently addressed: (6) the difficult situation in the neighbourhood, especially in Africa, Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East; (7) the demographic situation in Europe; and (8) the democratic legitimacy of the European Union.¹

The next two topics were as frequently addressed as the previous topics, yet the leaders did not present cohesive perspectives on them. The first is linked to the general theme of European democracy and recent developments, such as (9) populism and rising Euroscepticism, which are perceived as threats by a majority of leaders. For example, Portuguese prime minister Costa remarked, that "what makes democratic politics different from populism is that democratic politics does not exploit fears, it does not feed on problems, it does not encourage a return to a utopian past that has never existed. On the contrary: democratic politics responds to problems, combats fears and anguish, and regenerates hope in the future". Macron continued: "It would be convenient, indeed, to spoil the people or to exploit these passions to avoid proposing a path. Criticizing

without proposing, destroying without constructing." A different perspective was offered by the Polish prime minister Morawiecki, who rejected a negative definition of populism. He asked: "Is a response to expectations of citizens truly a populism?". It may be the difference between *expectations* and *fears* is only in semantics, and the true problem is in what the Belgian leader Michel explained: "confidence is the key to democracy. Democracy is a contract between citizens and their representatives", and the phrase was completed by Morawiecki: "historically this contract has been based on the restoration of security and the economic policy that offered a relative wealth for all. Today we have to annex this contract by restoring the feeling of security and hope for a better future for our children."

The last premise for the current debate is (10) globalisation. All leaders addressed the issue. For some it is a source of threats. Michel: "Europe is associated with fear-inducing globalisation, austerity, opacity or technocracy". Macron: "Every day geopolitical menaces [...] give Europe bigger responsibility". Dutch premier Rutte remarked that the "multilateral order is being challenged in a way that we haven't seen in decades, and the geopolitical balance of power is shifting". Yet, as Costa said, "we cannot confront globalisation by closing borders or building walls [...] Europe can only gain from continuing to project a vision of a Union open to the world [...] Globalisation demands that we invest in training and education, in innovation, and in the infrastructure that we need to be part of global networks." Last remark is from Irish Taoiseach Varadkar: "in the Europe of the future all member states will be small states even if they do not all realise that yet." All nine agreed that Europe needs to speak with one voice, and that the objective global situations – perceived as threats or opportunities – should be confronted jointly.

The values debate

All leaders referred to the catalogue of European values of the EU treaties and the Charter of Fundamental

¹ Ranking of issues 1-10 does not reflect their relative importance.

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Rights. What in the past seemed like an obvious statement in recent years – and in all the speeches – became an important element of the debate on the future of Europe. Greek prime minister Tsipras pointed that “the refugee crisis [...] confirmed the inability in Europe to go forward since many of the member states do not believe in its founding values”. But all those who spoke addressed the values as a key element of European integration. What changed seems to be the significance of European values, since potentially, maybe not all of EU member states no longer actually share the same set of values.

The reference to peace continues to play an important role, at least for members of the European Council from Ireland and Croatia. Prime minister Plenković reminded the audience in plenary about the destruction of Vukovar back in 1991, and the value of peace feeling that feels real for the modern day generation of Croats. Taoiseach Varadkar talked about the value of maintaining the 1998 Good Friday peace agreement in Northern Ireland. Among other European values mentioned by leaders were: equality, freedom (also the freedom of speech), justice, human dignity, fundamental rights and the rights of the people belonging to minority. The value of cooperation, compromise, trust and solidarity between European states were mentioned, too, alongside the diversity of the Union.

Those who say that the rule of law is a purely national matter are wrong
Mark Rutte 2018

The one value that triggered some controversy thus far was the value of rule of law, and more generally, defence of democracy. In the context of the ongoing wider discussions and procedures related to the rule of law in several member states (in recent years the European Parliament examined or examines the rule of law situations in Poland, Hungary, Malta, Romania and Slovakia, to name a few) a few speakers took the floor to mention this topic. The strongest view was presented probably by Dutch prime minister Rutte: “there can be no democratic legitimacy without the rule of law [...] ours is a union of laws and values. [...] It means opting unconditionally for freedom of the press, an independent judiciary, legal certainty and all those other democratic achievements that bind us together

as a community of values. It’s literally part of the deal.” He finished with a warning: “Because those who say that the rule of law is a purely national matter are wrong.” Prime minister Michel reminded his audience of the words of Winston Churchill: “The League of Nations did not fail because of its principles or conceptions. It failed because these principles were deserted by those States which brought it into being” and complemented them with his own: “We are committed to democracy and the rule of law at all costs.” Belgium proposed a new rule of law peer review mechanism that all member states would be subjected to. Luxembourgish prime minister Bettel supported the idea of linking the rule of law situation with the financial assistance provided within the cohesion policy. As if called to respond to allegations, prime minister Morawiecki remarked that “respect for [...] national identities is a foundation for the trust in the Union. The constitutional pluralism [...] is of a great value and every member state of the Union has a right to formulate its own legal system according to its own traditions.”

Quo vadis Europa? A range of proposals

The nine presented visions on the future of Europe reflected on many policy areas. Sometimes the leaders made more concrete proposals, some others have referred to the Commission scenarios, yet many underline that the main role of the European Union is not to replace its member states, but to empower them by creating an *added value*.

In the process of Brexit negotiations one of the most difficult issues is the situation in Northern Ireland. In order not to undermine the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (which ended the conflict in Northern Ireland) the government in Dublin has had an important contribution to make to the EU position. Varadkar: “There can be no return to a hard border on our island, no new barriers to the movement of people or to trade.”

What should the Union do? Each speaker’s perspective was true to his country, his experience, his political affiliation, and sometimes even to his generation. In this

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analysis the author will attempt to classify their presentations: does the combination of the nine views lead to creating a holistic vision of the future of the EU? Eight themes were largely put forward in the speeches

The first theme, which was very popular with speakers, was the **single market**, which was addressed from multiple angles. Many speakers spoke about the digital single market and the unfinished business of the single market in services, for example in insurance, mortgages and loans (as argued by the Irish leader). The prime ministers of Belgium and Poland talked about challenge of addressing artificial intelligence. The prime minister of Croatia pointed out the problem of different quality of goods in some countries. There were many voices calling for closing the businesses tax systems loopholes. This process should be wider than the EU; some have supported the OECD's work in this area. Many speakers referred to the challenge of competitiveness of the European economy. The leaders of Luxembourg and France supported the idea of introducing new taxes in the digital single market. Among more detailed proposals for regulating were, for example the electronic prescriptions (Plenković), protection of intellectual property of artists in the digital era (Macron), and the problem of electro-mobility of Europeans (Morawiecki).

The second theme is the future of the **Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)**. A leitmotif for the leaders was to support the completion of the EMU, including the banking union and the capital markets union. There was no agreement on the convergence mechanism and a new fiscal capacity of the Eurozone. On the one hand president Macron and prime minister Costa support the idea, but on the other, prime ministers Rutte and Bettel rejected it. Rutte: "The basic promise of the euro was that it would bring us all greater prosperity – not a redistribution of prosperity. [...] The pleas now being made to establish a transfer union fly in the face of this promise. [...] A deal is a deal." The Dutch leader meant the *deal* of Stability and Growth Pact. Also, prime minister Bettel supported the process of Eurozone enlargement, while prime minister Plenković announced Croatia's intention of accession, and prime minister Tsipras claimed that "Greece has managed to become a part of the solution instead of being a part of

the problem for Europe" when it finished the eight-years-long supportive programs and is now, according to its head of government, "economically sovereign", again.

The third theme is a wide range of issues under the security umbrella. From among them, **migration** stands out as the most frequently addressed - a sign that both issues can be sometimes uncomfortably construed. The fight against terrorism also remains a very important priority challenge. Almost every speaker called for a new asylum policy "unblocking the debate poisoned by the Dublin regulation and relocalisation", as described by the French president. The prime minister of Belgium demanded a new system of a legal and organised migration, while the leader of Portugal called for a closer cooperation of intelligence forces. President Macron proposed a new European program to provide financial support communities willing to accommodate refugees, and the prime minister of Croatia called for the Schengen zone enlargement. The three Benelux prime ministers talked about a common border management of the external borders of the Union. Supporting the initiatives, the prime minister of Greece reminded how his country reacted in the height of migration crisis: "within a climate of protection of international law", the Greeks supported the migrants despite their own dire economic situation. It was not an easy situation, but the difference between the Greeks and other Europeans was the fact that thousands of refuge-seekers landed on the Greek shores and this troubled Greece was their safety.

The fourth theme was the **energy and climate policy**. Many leaders talked about two parallel transformative process taking place currently: one was a digital revolution, and the second – the energy/climate transition. Common management of the process is widely supported. Prime minister Rutte expressed his desire to increase the Union's ambition and limit the EU's CO2 emission levels by 55% until 2030. President Macron envisaged a new tax on excessive carbon dioxide emissions.

External affairs attracted the leaders' attention in multiple dimensions. Many supported the closer cooperation in defence policy (PESCO) and underlined the need for PESCO to be compatible with NATO. Trade policy was also frequently mentioned: prime minister Costa views this

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policy as means to regulate world markets, defending the European social, environmental and health standards. The Prime ministers of Portugal and Poland also supported the idea of a new Marshall Plan for Africa. The individual problems were mentioned from the Union's immediate neighbourhood, conflicts in Africa or in the Middle East, relations with Russia and United States and other strategic partners. The prime ministers of Ireland, Greece and Croatia supported the Western Balkans enlargement process, while the prime minister of Belgium talked about "maintaining relations" with the countries in the region. Prime minister Plenković dedicated special attention to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and prime minister Tsipras called for keeping a European perspective for Turkey.

The sixth theme is the Union's **social policy**. Since the 2017 Gothenburg Summit there is a new in-depth discussion about what the EU can and what the EU should do in this newly discovered European social policy. The Greek leader called for a new thinking about the social issues calling for a "new social contract for social cohesion" and asked for a new framework to help cohesion. Most other leaders tended to use the language of the European Council documents: where is and what should be the *value added* of the social Europe? In this context, some members referred generally to the Gothenburg declaration, while another popular topic was the EU's labour market. Prime minister of Croatia called for a *fair* labour market and the Portuguese head of government name was slightly different – *dignified employment*. This area has a great potential for cooperation, as noticed by the Croatian leader, who mentioned also a fair social insurance system and pensions. The prime minister of Luxembourg called for fight against social dumping.

The **legitimacy of the European Union** and the institutional issues is the next pool of issues of leaders' interest. Prime ministers Bettel and Varadkar supported the idea of transnational electoral lists to the European Parliament. The Spitzenkandidat process was supported unequivocally only by the Taoiseach. The Luxembourgian leader remarked that the Spitzenkandidaten (candidates for the presidency of the European Commission) should be also candidates on the transnational lists. President Macron is

yet another supporter of the transnational lists, which were part of his presenting campaign pledge.

Two leaders, prime ministers Bettel and Rutte, talked about the *second* source of democratic legitimacy of the Union (the first being the European Parliament), which are the national parliaments. In the context of subsidiarity and proportionality discussion, Taoiseach Varadkar asked: "do we have the balance right?". President Macron repeated the idea of creating European universities, and prime minister Michel appealed for a new peer review mechanism on the rule of law in all members of the Union.

The **multiannual financial framework** (MMF) after 2020 was another source for debate. It is clear that in this area, leaders rarely left their initial national negotiating positions or expectations. Only marginally have they managed to step out of their national roles. The Prime ministers of Ireland, Portugal and France expressed support a larger EU budget, but the Dutch leader said that the next MMF should be limited since it will be negotiated for a smaller Union without Britain. It could be that the nominally smaller *Dutch* budget will not differ much from a bigger *Irish-Portuguese-French* budget, since they did not mention if they meant a nominal EU budget, or their own proportional contributions. The Netherlands, too, is ready "to pay more", as long as other net payers equally contribute more, proportionally. Ireland and France have already responded: yes.

The size of the Union budget is one thing, and another is its sources. Many speakers supported looking for new sources of income for the EU budget in general, while some already have some ideas in mind what kind of taxes should be introduced. There were ideas for digital or environmental taxes, and increasing income by abolition of national rebates. Some prime ministers wanted current policies to remain unchanged and new financial resources should be directed to new policy initiatives. The Belgian and Dutch leaders opposed such a logic calling for reforms in the cohesion and agriculture policy. Supporters of the cohesion policy are the leaders of Ireland, Croatia, Portugal and Poland. Additionally, prime minister Costa would like to link the cohesion prioritisation with the difficult social situation

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in cities, while prime minister Bettel would like to link cohesion spending with the respect of the rule of law.

Everybody seems to be in support of the policy of student exchange Erasmus and want to maintain or expand the policy. Most support the investment into research, development, innovations as well as to fight natural disasters. New policies that would require new financing are defence, migration and digital economy.

Summing Up

Naturally, the debate of nine European national leaders is not a full pan-European debate. In the next few months this process will continue to take place in Strasbourg during the European Parliament plenary sessions. It will include more contributions. What do we know so far?

Those debates thus far seem like an introduction to something larger, maybe even a future convention? What we have seen so far is a "mapping" of the problems, issues, solutions, which only grouped together can give a full perspective on what is the true state of the Union and what its future might be. Four voices come out of the Commission's scenarios. First is the scenario of enhanced cooperation, which prime minister Michel called an "avant-garde". The French leader also spoke along those lines. This is a call for everyone else which could be paraphrased this way: "let us go forward. If we succeed, you will join us. Doors remain open." But who are *we* and who determines who belongs to *we* and who does not? What will be the rules of a pioneer group? How will such a step forward look like?

The second voice is reflective of the Commission's scenario *less is more* but more effectively. Already in 2013 the Rutte government published a document called *Testing European legislation for subsidiarity and proportionality – the Dutch list of points for action*. The Dutch already know what they want to claim back to the national level, but do the other members of the Union share the same view? The third is the unclear Irish perspective. On the one hand, the Irish Taoiseach also supports reclaiming some of the powers back to the national level *as appropriate*. On the other hand, he supports evolution of the existing policies, expansion of

European cooperation into new policy areas and an increase of the EU budget. One could ask if such a balanced approach could be taken as a voice for "continuation"?

Meanwhile the Polish head of government called for the creation of the Union of Nations 2.0+ along the lines of the vision of Charles de Gaulle's original *Europe of Nations* concept. He proposed to look for new balances between member states and the EU decision-making level (probably, the so-called *community method*) not by focusing on *what* should be subject to the European decision making, but *how* the European decision-making looks like. Traditionally, the concept of *Europe of Nations* is referred to in order to curtail the competences and independence of the supranational European institutions.

Each perspective of a national leader was not only their personal reflection on the future of Europe. It did not depend only on their national political context back home. Sometimes to address the European Parliament was an occasion to update on latest developments (Greece way out of the crisis), to promote their state (Croatia's tourism, Poland's economy) or to teach the public about history (Portugal's dictatorship, Irish poverty, Poland's communist dictatorship). Sometimes it was a difficult-to-miss opportunity to refer to a specific national debate on Europe. For example, in June, Europe once again heard about the Camelopard. This was a name given by ancient Romans to never-seen-before giraffe when they saw the animal for the first time: it had a neck like a camel and spots like a leopard. Johan Beyen, Dutch foreign minister in 1950s, who is regarded as one of the *pères fondateurs* of the EU, wrote on Europe in these words: "Europe is like a giraffe: an animal difficult to define but easy to recognise". This anecdote came from prime minister Rutte.

The June 2018 Meseberg Declaration between the French President and weakened German Chancellor Merkel has focused largely on the same priorities. President Macron's concept of a *sovereign, democratic and united Europe* crossed Rhein and entered Berlin. Some other important adjectives used in this declaration took the concept a bit further: *competitive, prosperity, defence of economic and social model* were used. It should be "Europe that promotes an open society, based on shared values of

pluralism, solidarity and justice, upholding the rule of law everywhere in the EU”, a Europe that promotes peace, security and sustainable development. Among other tasks are climate change and migration.

The Meseberg Declaration is much more specific and detailed than any of the speeches in the European Parliament. It is not a visionary document, but more of a work in progress. Most importantly, it called for a unified Franco-German front on the EMU reform, including the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) changes, the ESM credit line, the ESM backstop and the Eurozone budget starting in 2021. It may well be that the future of Europe is not truly decided by the collective of perspectives of 27 national leaders, but by a convergence of positions of the two strongest EU nations. In this regards, the next stop ahead is the November Merkel speech. By the end of 2018 all fourteen speeches will be delivered – for the remaining five speeches the Meseberg Declaration is an important point of reference, too.

Conclusion

Europe has changed. Business as usual cannot continue. This is the basic starting reflection of the current debate. The only way for a “carry on” of the Commission scenario to take place seems to be the default option if no agreement exists elsewhere. Failing to do more might however be destructive for those who want to do more and no longer wish to wait. This is why this is not the preferred, or even probable, option.

Provided the political landscape in the “core of the core of Europe”² remains largely unscathed, there is indeed a future for European integration. To do more is necessary, not based on Euro-federalist thinking, but because of the realities of globalisation. Europeans need to stick to one another in order to have any chance to impact world affairs. The political convergence of ideas and proposals between France and Germany cannot be blocked by anyone else. These two countries are the leaders of two main groupings,

which are the two main camps within today’s European Union. On the one hand are the protagonists of a Europe that is more socially savvy. On the other hand are the protagonists of a Europe of existing rules – here best illustrated by the Dutch leader. Both camps agree: Europe is an unfinished project. It needs to be worked on. It requires committed dedication of the new generation of leaders. The urgency of action is frequently imminent. This is the convergence: when those two camps work out a new compromise, be it in a form of a treaty reform, or a set of new policies, or a separate treaty, this most likely is going to settle issues for a generation to come.

There remains the problem of the unity of EU-27, at least on two main issues: the context of the Eurozone and the commitment to the rule of law. The crises years have illustrated many things, including the limited trust - at times - of certain member states towards the others, which in a way seems to have neatly illustrated “who” feels ownership over the European project: it is largely within the Eurozone, but not only. Yet there seems to be a growing understanding that the gravity of the situation does not allow for any future backwards movement.

There needs to be a different layer of agreement between those who advance certain issues or policies forward and those who stay behind. They shall stay behind either because they *can* but *won't* join (the will factor), or because they *can't*, even if they *wanted* to join (the capacity factor). This is why, if any of the Commission scenarios are more likely to be reality, it seems that it will be the scenario of “avant-garde”, or pioneer group(s).

² Germany, France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.



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