

The European idea

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Abstract:

The European Union is a unique political entity, whose sovereign member countries pool authority in key areas of government in order to reach shared goals. Every national of a Member State is also an EU citizen, giving them the right to participate in the democratic life of the bloc.

The article aim to illustrate the common values of the existing European idea, the nature of the European Union, its creation, institutional effectiveness, approach to past crises, and outlook over the next couple of decades. By focusing on the constant tug and pull between state governments of member countries and EU institutions, the main focus is related at discerning the fundamental structural flaws at the core of the Union and how the push for integration is jeopardized by the ongoing economic and migratory crises.

The article has intention to make an overview on the evolution of the European Union, and what lessons learned can be applied to Europe's current challenges.

Due to the fact that EU is faced with unprecedented challenges, the further realistic and logical approaching is more than necessary in order to stabilized and to move forward towards the future of European Union and its citizens and institutions as a complex and contemporary model.

Is Europe in the midst of a crisis of democratic governance? Will populism undo the Europe Union? Can Europe handle the challenges of an aging population, an influx of refugees, and slow economic growth?

Key words: *European idea, common values, evaluation, crisis*

Introduction

European integration has long been rooted in practical arguments instead of overarching visions, writes.

The European Union is a unification of states united to create a Political and Economic Community throughout Europe. Though the idea of the EU might sound simple at the outset, the European Union has a rich history and a unique organization, both of which aid in its current success and its ability to fulfill its mission for the 21st Century. [1].

The great trick of European integration was to dodge the question of the European idea. Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet, architects of the Union, realized this early. Any grand idea of a European future around which European leaders could coalesce would be so vapid as to be meaningless in practice.

The European idea, in reality was always a multitude of European ideas, serving a wide range of purposes. Under threat of Communism, European integration provided a Western bulwark.

Their solution was to focus on practical, technical developments the sharing of coal and steel production from which all could benefit. Ask not what the EU is but what it can do was the prevailing philosophy. Through functional cooperation they believed, habits of collaboration would develop, economies would become intertwined and the prospect of warfare between the cooperating states would become impracticable. Around this mundane technical collaboration, national leaders were free to wrap their individual national narratives. These competing narratives, however instrumental, should not be ignored. Just as the founders hoped that habits of integration would develop over time, we now see a huge mobilization of resource to preserve the integrity of the EU. Perhaps the habit of European cooperation is producing an idea of Europe based on everyday concerns and interests rather than a grand vision.

These interests are shaped by and shape narratives.

From the historic perception, the idea of European Union has been as much a tool in national debates, selectively invoked to support current narratives, as any overarching plan. This remains the case today.

In the context of current perception, in the referendum on Scottish independence, the EU played a prominent role. Scots were roundly warned of the perils of independence that would surely jeopardize their future EU membership, an irony not lost on many of the Scottish voters who now face a referendum on the UK's membership. In turn, the distinct attitudes of Scots to European Union membership played an important role in the SNP's case for a double majority in the UK referendum, to ensure that Scottish voters could not be removed from the 'European family of nations' against their will.

The future shape of the European Union is in question and the very idea of European Union is under challenge. According to the statement of L. Cram [2], the pre supposes that a European idea exists, ever existed or could even be agreed upon.

A history of dictatorship could be distanced as membership of the Union symbolized democratic standing. For Germany, a commitment to peace and European solidarity was a powerful rehabilitating narrative. For the more reluctant UK and Denmark, the technical trade-based idea of European Union allowed them to present cooperation in Europe as a minimalist guarantor of access to markets. [3].

An overview of the creation of the EU

The history of the European idea, obviously, goes back centuries, if not perhaps even millennia, but has been particularly gripping and compelling to Europeans since the end of the Second World War. There was never one single European idea, but obviously, in the aftermath of the Second World War and the tremendous carnage created there, there was an effort to try to end largely, it had discredited nationalism and the nation state with the important exception,

According to the Walter Russell Mead [3], the European Union has tended to confront a number of crises over the course of its history. Actually, the ongoing European integration process has been one in fits and starts.

Having in mind the European institutional and structural development in every crisis, or in many crises from the origins of the European Union with the European Coal and Steel Community, to the launching of the European Economic Communities in the Treaty of Rome, to the movement toward the Single European Act in the 1980s, and then the Maastricht Treaty in every case, there was a sense that unless Europe moved forward it would face increased crisis, and that the centrifugal forces would be too great. And that has driven in sort of what the French would call *fuite en avant*, has driven forward European integration. The European idea will move away from Jean Monnet's notion of a supranational Europe and an ever-closer union, and regardless of what the Brits decide in their referendum in June, that we're head towards more a multi-speed Europe more of a Europe *des Patries*, in the vision of *Charles de Gaulle* which has always been the opposite pole in thinking about what the European idea is.

Crises that Europe faces today

The essence of crises is very important issue. For example, the Eurozone crisis and the refugee crisis have in common that this is a crisis of a non-functioning governance system with regard to monetary union and with regard to migration/asylum policy. Both projects are halfway houses. As B. Lippert noted, [4] indicated, they started as gradual processes and they are unfinished business, and now they are struck by this kind of dysfunctionality.

According to the J. Cwiek-Karpowicz, definitely, to analyze public opinion perception about European Union, this is a very difficult task. [5]

From one side the Europeans often vote against European Union. This is an example of 2005 and referendum in the Netherlands and in France, and Dutch and French people voted against European Constitution. So they didn't want a more integrated Europe. But, on the other hand, there are many examples of quite positive image of European Union among European citizens.

And quite recently European Union published the result of surveys, and more than 60 percent of Europeans believe in the future of European Union, and almost the same

percentage believe in EU more than in the national parliaments and national governments.

And in the process of analyzing some European Member States and then societies there, it might be that definitely Central Europeans are much more positive about European Union, and they still perceived EU as the only way not only to create its own foreign policy, but also to have prospects for better economic development, and also for its own security. Further, the issue about the crisis, is different story told by different speed of integration.

But definitely for Central Europe, the European Union and economic integration is an element of its own security. And it's not by chance that the most-integrated countries in the EU are Baltic States, or *Visegrad Group* [6] countries as well, because for them to be, in the EU and very well integrated, being good Europeans means be protected also, although EU is not a security alliance. In this occasion the Ambassadors in Italy, The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia discussed about the experiences and the institutional views of their countries upon a number of themes, among which Central European integration, post socialist transition, European Union and the migrant crises, Particular space was given to the need of maintaining a specific national identity even without wider multilateral organizations. The Visegrad for regime has been particular useful to the fulfillment of this goal.

Euro currency

After crisis 2008 and 2009, when definitely many Europeans had some doubt about common currency, since 2013 there is a positive trend, and more and more countries and citizens believe in the euro currency, especially those who adopted euro currency quite recently. And among, then, the less-optimistic are countries who are still outside the Eurozone, U.K., Denmark, but also Poland and a few other countries.

Europe's drive to deepen integration of the euro-area banking system has bogged down as policy makers debate ways to rein in banks' holdings of government debt.

This sovereign debt issue has gained in importance in recent months because of Germany's insistence that the 19-nation currency bloc should reduce the risks banks are facing, including sovereign debt on their balance sheets, before

creating a common deposit insurance system to round out the so-called banking union.

The two main options on the table for dealing with sovereign bonds would be to impose limits on the concentration of debt that banks can hold, or to limit the current practice of treating many sovereign bonds as risk-free for regulatory reporting. Germany favors adding risk weights to give incentives for weaker sovereigns to sell less debt to their banks, while countries like Italy and France favor concentration limits that would prevent giving overt advantages to banks in stronger countries at the expense of their peers. [7]

Democracy in the European Union and Fundamental contradictions

There is a set of essential questions usually raised when the subject is taking about the democracy.

Why is democratic decision-making important in a political system? What is the aim of a democracy? To what extent does the European Union have to be democratic in order to achieve its goals? Many would argue that economic integration would eventually push forward political integration. Do we agree? Finally, to what extent do European countries have to be politically unified in order to defend the interests of their citizens? [8]

From the Institutional and functional perspective, The European Union is not a state, so comparisons with state-type models of democratic legitimization may well prove misleading. Nor is the discussion about intervening ex novo to introduce democratic accountability within an organization that did not previously know it.

The first direct election to the European Parliament took place nearly thirty years ago, since then, the Union's institutional system has continued to evolve, establishing significant scope for democratic participation and control in the process.

The Union has continued to design new legitimization solutions for multi-level and transnational political structures, which may well represent the future of democracy in a world of diverse but increasingly interconnected communities. [9]

Once the Union is recognized for what it is an innovative polity, where power is shared by a large number of players, with many participation and influence wielding mechanisms, constantly adapting its institutions to the requirements of its component parts, it becomes apparent that on the whole it complies no less with democratic legitimization standards than do member states, as it is stated by Mény, [10]

The question of fundamental contradiction is, where, then here is the choice of re-nationalization, and including throwing up borders, which of course was the response of many European nations, or have more Brussels or more centralization, as M. Patrick elaborated.

The very enlargement of the European Union, which has always had debate between how much deepening in other words, how much more authority and how much more you get involved in giving vertical authority to European-wide structures versus enlargement, how much do expanding the frontiers. The fact that it's expanding now to 28 nations means that you've increased the cultural and political diversity as well.

Refuge crisis as a common issue

This issue is very much connected with the statement when Angela Merkel threw open the welcome mat for refugees, what she was essentially doing was saying, look, this is part of being European this is part of the European idea, is that EU welcome people in distress. Obviously, she had her own the burdens of German history there, too. But Merkel stated that, and she expected solidarity, and what she got was not solidarity at all.

So there is solidarity competing with sovereignty, with many of the countries saying no, we're not going to do this. And now, in the wake of Paris and now Brussels and undoubtedly more terrorist events, you have a third S, security, coming into play. And that's why I think that we're going to see more re-nationalization and more of a multi-speed Europe where there's more opting-in and opting-out regardless, as I said, of what happens with the British decision.

The refugee crisis poses a serious challenge, both to the welfare of refugees and to European societies. In 2015, more than 1.5 million migrants crossed into the European Union. From Italy to Poland, and from Greece to Germany, countries face immense challenges in responding to requests for humanitarian aid, asylum, and integration. The associated integration challenges in housing, language, work and welfare are already formidable. Failing to manage them properly poses serious threats to social cohesion and political stability.

European countries have had sufficient time to analyses and assess the long-standing challenges which created the current crisis. Now it is time to act not individually and at the expense of others, but jointly and in a spirit of European solidarity.

Definitely, there is urgent need for a common European approach, to compliment local and national efforts an individual capacity. At present, there is no consensus among member states on how to respond to the crisis, neither on the objectives to be achieved or the methods to be used. But disagreements on substance must be overcome now.

Further actions

Building on current discussions, we propose a comprehensive agenda at the EU level, with five major dimensions.

First, it is important to control the EU's external borders so that only refugees fleeing war and persecution, who have a legitimate right to seek asylum, can enter and potentially remain in the EU. The porous nature of EU's external borders has an unacceptable loss of control in the eyes of many EU citizens and has raised false hopes for irregular migrant trying to enter the Union. The control of the borders of Schengen Area should be a collective effort of the EU and all Member States, coordinated by European Institutions with professional staff and with financial support provided to Member States at the EU's periphery. Regaining control of the EU's external borders is essential to preserve open internal borders.

Second, beyond implementing the already agreed upon relocation of 160,000 refugees from Greece and Italy, the EU should develop a system which distributes a much larger

number of refugees across the Union, directly from the hotspots in the EU and the neighboring countries such as Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon. Member States not willing to host refugees themselves could choose to make a primarily financial contribution to the system. A Migration Solidarity Fund should be created to manage this compensatory system. Turkey's efforts to reduce the crossings in the Aegean Sea should be matched by a willingness among EU Member States to take in refugees in an orderly manner. The Conclusions from the European Council seem to move in the right direction in this regard.

The third measure should be to improve, standardize and speed up the processes to determine asylum applications. The sooner refugees know whether they can stay, the more energy can be invested in their integration into host countries' societies and in family reunions. The sooner a decision is taken, the fairer and more feasible it is to send Back those request are refused in full respect of International law and Human rights.

The EU members cannot afford to have vastly different standards in granting asylum status. Under international law, there can be no limit set on the number of those eligible to request asylum. [11]

EU External mobility

According to the Karpowich the external movement is essential issue for the current and further economic growth within the EU, especially in the context of so called internal migrants. The Europeans who change their places in EU, for example is very much connected with the Central Europe. Many people from Central region try to find jobs in Western Europe.

The EU is very much concerned how to encourage mobility of Europeans. The problem is that, in European Union, there is so many languages, cultures, heritages, and it is a real approach for creation a common space where people may freely change their location. And that's why the process of unification of standards in education and the labor markets, and it's going deeper and deeper.

And this is something maybe national governments would like to stop and block for a moment, not just to go too far and to keep their sovereignty. The profits are so huge for

public opinion, and citizens really want to continue this trend, that probably, despite the immigration crisis, EU would follow this path and would encourage Europeans to be much more flexible, mobile, and create many advantages for them for looking for jobs in different EU states.

EU Challenges

Currently, the UK's special status is subject of deep concern due to the very serious elements.

And this is something that has been achieved in common history, that indeed people can freely find jobs and change countries. It was the element of a U.K. decision to stay in the European Union.

Before referendum, UK signed a special agreement proposed by the president of European Council, and one of the element(s) was that some social benefits from migrants from European Union who works in the UK should be limited.

The UK has special status in a reformed EU. It has kept the pound, will not join the euro and has kept control of the UK border. The UK Government has negotiated a new settlement with the EU ahead of the referendum. The Government believes this deal gives the UK within the EU the best of both worlds.

The UK has secured a special status in a reformed EU:

- will not join the euro,
- will keep own border controls,
- will not be part of further European political integration,
- will be tough new restrictions on access to our welfare system for new EU migrants.

On Thursday, 23rd June UK will have the opportunity to decide if the United Kingdom remains in the European Union and no doubt it is a big decision for a great UK history. The Government believes that voting to remain in the EU is the best decision for the UK. This is a chance for decision and own future and the future of the UK [12]

The external pressure and migration crisis so far doesn't change these rules. And this is something which European Union is trying to differentiate, migration problems and mobility.

Conclusion

It's a time also to contribute and take responsibility. At the same time, this is a very difficult question for national governments, because no one would like to be claim or just described by public opinion as a government who rather plays for European interests, not national interests.

So, it's very important to distinguish the rhetoric. In this context has to be mentioned that very often, many national governments try to underline that we serve our national interests we are against superficial, artificial European, demands or values. But in reality, they play exactly in line with European interests.

In this context, it's important to note that this vision which inspired many of the early moves towards European integration was from the beginning and remains largely an elite-driven phenomenon.

According to the S. M. Patrick, one of the problems that we've seen over the course of the last seven decades is the degree to which this elite-driven and often technocratic movement towards integration has led to an increasing democratic deficit and questions or only simply a democratic deficit with respect to institutions of the European Union, but also an emotional deficit.

When is a question about crisis and the European Union, it just has to be admit that crisis is a state of being for the European Union because it started out of a crisis, on the ruins of the Second World War.

The European Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect of human rights. Including rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, nondiscrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and quality between the people prevail. [13]

The European idea has to be promoted with serious consideration. A comprehensive strategy needs to be developed. It is important to determine who is responsible for what and how a potential strategy can evolve into an autonomous process in the regions in question.

Additionally, the division of labor between the EU and the other countries, especially in determining the relationship with the US as well as with Russia separately should take priority.

The acceptance of multilateral relationships requires the possibility of contact on all levels, from politicians to the common citizen. One can conclude by asserting that there is certainly no deficit of initiatives and organizations which operate on a European, regional and sub-regional basis. [14]

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