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de Europese Unie. Dat is namelijk ook geen vrolijk vooruitzicht, en dat lost het probleem ook niet op. Het zou de herbevestiging zijn van een oude deling tussen Oost- en West-Europa. Het brengt de spanning terug tussen Europa als waardenproject, als belichaming van democratie en mensenrechten, en Europa als geografisch project, de gedachte dat Europa op een dag zou samenvallen met het continent als geheel.”

Wat betreft die laatste gedachte: moet D66 dat ideaal van een federaal Europa, van een *ever closer union*, loslaten? “Ja. Als een federaal Europa neerkomt op staatsvorming en centralisatie en de Commissie als de regering: ja, laat dat los. Nog los van de huidige tijdsgeest: het spoot niet met de geschiedenis van de Europese Unie. De Europese Unie is een uitdrukking van de eenheid van ons continent, maar ook van de pluraliteit van ons continent. Neem alleen al Frankrijk en Duitsland: twee buurlanden die in ongeveer alles totaal verschillend zijn. Ik denk dat het heel belangrijk is dat die verschillen ook zichtbaar blijven, erkend worden. Dat dat niet onder het motto van federalisering weg wordt gemoffeld.”

Tot slot: wat is een blinde vlek voor D66 of sociaal-liberalen als we het hebben over Europa? “De behoefte aan bescherming die veel kiezers hebben. Het besef dat Europa, juist vanwege de openheid die het biedt, door veel kiezers als bedreiging wordt gezien en dat dat niet helemaal onterecht is. De Europese Unie werkt van nature aan het neerhalen van grenzen, aan het vergroten van vrijheden en kansen. Kansen voor het type mensen dat op D66 stemt. Ook mensen zoals ik, zeg ik er meteen bij. Mensen die van reizen houden, die diploma's hebben, die talen spreken, die eerder in termen van kansen dan van dreigingen denken. Maar er zijn veel kiezers voor wie dat niet geldt. Die groep verwacht van Europa niet per se kansen en vrijheden, maar bescherming. Vooral qua identiteit. Die mensen hebben het besef dat Europa de Europese beschaving op het wereldtoneel alleen kan verdedigen indien we dat samendoen.

Als het antwoord op de kiezersrevolte van de afgelopen jaren is: we moeten ons werk beter doen, nog meer wetgeving en rechten voor mensen regelen, dat is dus precies verkeerd. Dan zit je in de groef, dat je alleen voor je eigen klanten werkt, voor je eigen clientèle, en niet voor de mensen die zich in de steek gelaten voelen.” ●

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The European integration process is potentially in collapse. Therefore Ulrike Guérot would like to offer to think Europe differently, meaning a paradigm shift from 'The United States of Europe' to a 'European Republic': not the states would do Europe, but the citizens would do it.

Door Ulrike Guérot



The state of Europe

How to move and shake the EU towards becoming a real democracy

As Stefan Zweig once wrote:

we as contemporaries are not able to recognise the historical moment that we are in. And this moment is the potential collapse of the European integration project. With Brexit looming at the horizon in March 2019; with Poland and Hungary already having sneaked out of European “Rule-of-Law” standards; with Austria struggling with media concentration or intrusion of its Intelligence Agency; with the Italian budget crisis and with European elections in May 2019, displaying the so-called populist parties at rank second of the seat distribution, the EU may be not only in a deep, multiple crisis; it might be beyond “peak” so to say: incapable to reform itself and structurally doomed to hostile take-over by identitarian, populist and nationalist forces.

A deep low for the EU

The EU has, in fact, fallen to a deep low. Last year it enjoyed the confidence of only around 47 per cent of all Europeans. The great erosion of the European idea has left deep marks on the continent. The party systems in most EU member states have collapsed along the dividing line of the positioning towards the EU, not least in the wake of the euro crisis, with parties in Southern countries turning “populist” for the sake of austerity and parties in Northern Europe turning “populist” for the sake of “no-transfer-union”. The European social democrats have mostly disappeared, the European left is deeply divided in all EU member states and the political vacuum is filled by nationalist parties that have come together in a kind of “identitarian international” from Geert Wilders to Marine Le Pen, the Polish Law and Justice (PiS) party to the Hungarian Fidesz party, the True Finns, the Austrian FPÖ or the German AfD. These parties are all well organised, they have large electorates behind them and get a lot of financial sponsoring. Capitalism has shown in the 20s of last century that it is compatible with fascism. Capitalism demonstrates these days that it is equally compatible with populism: stock markets went through the roof, when Trump or Bolsonaro in Brazil were elected, meaning: markets do *welcome* and not *punish* populism!

A Hegelian moment

This raises the question of what we are doing in this nearly “Hegelian” moment, in which a system is politically exhausted, but at the same time has no power to reform itself, because it is in a populist state of shock and afraid to move?

Populism could only be on the rise, because the citizens were the forgotten entity in the whole EU’s institutional set-up, which displays a parliament nearly without legislative power, no accountability and without control of the budget or the executive power of the EU. The so-called

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“democratic deficit” of the EU became unbearable in recent crisis years and legitimized critic was left to the populists, as the EU system showed increasing inertia to change. The sovereignty question – who decides in the EU? – became wide open and until it is clearly answered the EU will probably not have enough political cloud to do anything. The EU system of today as much as many of its member state have deep lacunas in recognizing the citizens will, or, to say it differently, in the organisation of the *volonté générale*, as Rousseau told us.

We definitely need to discover the European citizen as sovereign of the European political system, if we want to conquer the hearts and minds of people for Europe again, but a different kind of Europe: not a technocratic EU, but a democratic, transparent, accountable and social Europe!

The European Republic

Therefore, I would like to offer to think Europe differently, meaning a paradigm shift from “*The United States of Europe*” to a “*European Republic*”: not the *states* would *do* Europe, but the citizens would *do* it, in a fully parliamentarized European system, without being governed by an opaque European Council! This corresponds, by the way, exactly to what founding father Jean Monnet always said: “*Europe is not about integration states, but about uniting people*”. Europe as a republic is build around one single idea: the principle of political equality for all European citizens! Any democracy has as essential, though not sufficient condition that all it’s citizens are equal in front of the law. Classically, “one person, one vote” is the key requirement for a democracy and the composition of a single electoral body. Legal equality is, in the words of famous French sociologist Pierre Rosanvallon, “*Le Sacre du Citoyen*” – the “sacred” of the citizens.

In current European discussions it is often neglected that the notion of “*citoyen*” (“citizen”) means actually more than just sharing values or “*feeling*” somehow European. The notion of *citoyenneté* always has a *legal* underpinning: it basically means same *rights*! And precisely this is the problem of today’s EU, as the notion of a “European citizenship”, though granted in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, has remained normatively “empty” and does not grant all European citizens with equal rights. The Maastricht Treaty promised a “*Union of States*” and “*Union of Citizens*”. Yet, only the former materialized, not the latter. To make this concrete: Had we achieved a “*Union of Citizens*”, British citizens, now affected by Brexit, would – in theory – stay European citizens, despite the fact of the United Kingdom as a *state* leaving the EU. Brexit demonstrates more crudely that anything that “European citizenship” is only an empty shell and nearly meaningless! Citizens, who do embark in a political body based on equal rights (“*ius aequum*”, as Cicero said) establish a republic. If European citizens were to agree on the principle of political equality, they would thus found a European Republic. That would be a paramount paradigm shift from “*United States of Europe*”, based on *integration* of nation states, towards a European Republic, with sovereignty being in the hands of European citizens and a truly representative democracy in Europe.

Not the states would do Europe, but the citizens would do it

Lack of legal equality

One of the recurrent sentences in EU discussions is that the EU offers “Four Freedoms” for “*People, Goods, Capital and Services.*” Hence, until now, same European rights and regulations within the EU’s legal framework are only applying to goods (in the single market), to capital (in the currency union) and to services (the factor of work across the EU). All these three – goods, capital and services – benefit from legal equality throughout Europe. The only ones who are still fragmented into national “law containers” are the European citizens themselves. But the European citizens are the sovereign of the political system. In other words: oil cans or light bulbs are “equal” in European legislation across the EU, European citizens are not. Especially not regarding those things, which are dear to them with respect to the very character of a citizenship: voting, taxation and access to social rights. It is the European citizens, who don’t enjoy legal equality. If the aim of Europe is still to become a full fledged democracy – one market, one currency, one democracy – this must change! Applying the principal of general political equality for all Europeans citizens would precisely be the quantum leap for the EU from a purely internal market and currency project towards a *political unity* in Europe, which was the intention of the founding fathers.

Believe the unbelievable

For many, this does not sound possible today for Europe. Let’s remember for a second that today’s nation states – such as today’s Germany or today’s Italy – are the result of unitarian movements of the 19th century. Garibaldi once said: “*Now that I have created the Italian Republic, I need to create the Italian citizens.*” The unification of the German territories into a German Confederation around 1870 was quite similar. A unified German social insurance system was by then as much unimaginable as is today a common European unemployment scheme. So no one can say what is conceivable on the European level in the long run. Let’s not forget that most people didn’t believe in the Euro, until it was in their pocket. Many things seem unbelievable in the beginning. But then they happen.

Today’s European Union is not stable. Without a decisive step forward, the EU is not sustainable and system collapse is on the door step. The *one* European market and the *one* European currency must be embedded in a European democracy, because a currency is already a social contract! Europe in the 21st century can only function, if the European citizens are the sovereigns of the political system, if they are all equal before the law, if the European parliament decides and if there is separation of powers. The principle of general political equality is the basis of each and every democracy. If the EU were to implement it, this would be the “Great Reformation” of Europe! ●

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