

Deficiencies of the forward-looking EU policy making.

Working paper, still in progress. Comments welcome.

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Motto:

“European institutions have been set up as a club of several developed Western European countries in sunny weather. Today, the European Union includes the twenty-eight (may be less in the near future) which are culturally, economically, socially and politically very diverse, it is raining outside and leaking into the house itself.”

This paper begins with the overview of the EU's historical development, reflected by the concept of governance and governability. What follows is the sketch of its present shape. This will create the base to identify the deficiencies of the forward-looking EU policy, which stem from the discrepancy between the toxic mixture of several serious partial crises on one hand and insufficient concepts and instruments of strategic governance to deal with them on the other.

Historical development of the European Union

Until 1989:

- The post-war political climate: to prevent any future war through mutual economic dependence.
- The EU core established by 6 countries with comparable economic development and similar political structures in 1957.
- An integrating impact of the threat from the Soviet bloc.

After 1989:

- The neglected issue of common security (failing attempts to establish the European military corps).
- The lack of necessary financial resources (1% of GDP) accompanied by a weak political support at the level of Member States to achieve declared political objectives.
- A missing link: a popular, visible, comprehensive and direct link between Brussels and European citizenry in the issues of everyday life, without mediation via national political class.

Critical decisions:

- The inappropriate application of the “snowball approach” to institutional changes (Jacques Delors' concept: to make EU a cyclist unable to dismount).
- The enlargement executed as a political big bang - despite huge political and economic differences between the newly accepted states - in 2004.
- Launching common monetary policy (Euro) without common fiscal policy.

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- Existing governance structures implemented within the EU framework prefer negative integration (removal of barriers, deregulation), lacking in reliable mechanisms for promoting positive integration (pursuit of social goals). (Scharpf 2009)

Present situation: an unprecedented complex crisis of the EU, consisting of several serious partial crises

Motto:

“The European Union and the Member States are confronted with an existential crisis of the entire European project. As a result of several successive crises an increasingly large share of the population perceives the EU as an undemocratic and unjust political system. Overall trust in institutions at both Union and Member State levels is waning, while ever louder calls for a repatriation of powers to the national level are shaking the EU to its core. (...) Distrust towards institutions has created a deepening divide between the Union and its citizens.” (Reconciling Europe 2018)

The global crisis which arose out of the financialization of an under-regulated global economy revealed and deepened many burning social issues in the European Union member countries. This fully exposed the Janusian character of the European Union. One face continues to promote economic liberalization (e.g., when the European Commission proposed a directive to privatize services of general interest; however, it did not pass through the European Parliament), fiscal discipline, labour market flexibility, restrictive pension reforms and a more competitive European economy. The other face talks about social justice, social rights, active ageing, and fight against poverty and social exclusion. It is increasingly clear to European Union citizens that the latter face is losing in the duel against the former and that it might even get knocked out. (Taylor-Gooby 2003, Piketty 2018, Potůček 2018)

Partial crises:

- Uncontrolled or poorly controlled migration, contributing to the rise of political extremism and authoritarianism.
- The European “troika” (European Commission, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund) rolling democratic decision making procedures at national level.
- Brexit (which might motivate some other Member States considering to follow suit).
- An inconsistent engagement in Ukraine, associated with deteriorated relations to Russia.
- The rising indebtedness of the majority of the EU Member States.
- The shaken legitimacy of the process of European integration in general and the EU in particular in the eyes of European citizens.

The deficiencies of the forward-looking EU policy

Motto:

“Our faith is in the great idea that we inherited, which we believe to have been the one force powerful enough to lift Europe’s peoples above themselves and their warring past. We believe it remains the one force today virtuous enough to ward off the new signs of totalitarianism that drag in their wake the old miseries of the dark ages. (...) We don’t have a choice. We must now fight for the idea of Europe or see it perish beneath the waves of populism.” (Fight for Europe 2019)

There are several barriers which will complicate the capability of the EU to deal with its acute and complex crisis:

- Absence of strategic governance capacity (Potůček 2017:73) of the European Commission, Parliament, and Council, which should call attention of politicians to emerging or future challenges, threats as well as opportunities.
- Lack of commonly shared values and aims which could make an effort to harmonize various partial interests among and within Member States.
- Lack of necessary financial resources (just 1% of GDP) accompanied by a weak political support at the level of Member States to achieve declared political objectives.
- Binding decision making structure of the EU as the Lisbon Agreement must be preserved in order to preserve at least some, although insufficient, binding institutional structure.
- Lack of statesmanship among top EU decision makers.

The European Commission presented its concept of thinking and deciding about the EU's future at the Rome summit of European leaders in March 2017. (White Paper 2017) Its five scenarios entitled *Carrying on, Nothing but the single market, Those who want more do more, Doing less more efficiently and Doing much more together* represent broad but, at the same time, quite vague ideas without clear-cut goals and ways how to achieve them. Impact on policies is significantly reduced to a single market & trade, economic & monetary union, Schengen, migration & security, foreign policy & defence, EU budget, and capacity to deliver... Issues that could not appeal to most of European citizens.

What can we expect? Most probably muddling through, but with a high uncertainty. A two-speed EU (a more integrated core with dependent periphery)? Regional partition? A move toward intergovernmentalism? Or even uncontrolled disintegration?

I have to admit: more questions than answers...

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