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BACKGROUND REPORT | MODEL VISEGRAD PLUS GERMANY | 01

White Paper on the future of Europe and the reform of the European Union

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1 Introduction

Recently, the European Union has celebrated 60 years since the ratification of the Treaties of Rome. Despite its retirement age, the European Union is in the eyes of many doing well. On the other hand, just as many tend not to trust the European Union and its institutions. In recent studies, both opinion groups were around 46 – 47 % of European population.¹ In the United Kingdom this mistrust contributed to the Brexit vote, which ended with the UK starting the process to exit the EU.

While the Euroscepticism is on the rise, the Union, if it wants to survive, must undergo changes. There is a need for a reliable plan for the future. A need for consensus at least on the basic principles of future development. The 27 remaining countries are now facing ever-changing globalized world and each one of these countries must decide if its future is in or out of the European Union.

2 White Paper on the future of Europe

In these critical times, it is important to set a course and that is exactly what the White Paper on the future of Europe is trying to achieve. The goal is to start a debate on the future European policy and its development. It underlines the importance of challenges and current issues the EU is facing. It identifies key areas, in which the development and common policy will be essential.

First of these areas is industry, which will, because of new technologies, undergo rapid development and automatization. Another one is climate change. An area where it will be necessary to bring new solutions to preserve the planet for the next generations. Together with these areas, the migration is one of the challenges that Europe must solve. In a similar manner, European countries must decide whether they want to cooperate in a common security and defence policy. Equally important is aging of the population, which pushes the states to the modernization of their social policies. Last but not least, the populist and nationalistic rhetoric is growing in each and every country and it is essential to restore the trust of the people in the institutions.

Jean-Claude Juncker prepared the White Paper on the future of Europe to initiate a debate on these topics to prepare the Union for facing these challenges and shaping them instead of being shaped by them. For this purpose, he prepared five possible scenarios to stir up the discussion.

2.1 Five scenarios

All five of these scenarios are visions of future of the Union by 2025.² They are neither specific nor being the only possible outcomes. The reason for that is to give as much space as possible to the member states to negotiate and find the ideal solution and consensus for everyone.

The first scenario is continuation. It focuses on the good impact that the European reforms have had. The key point of this scenario is the preservation of the positive agenda, deepening of the cooperation in areas like security and defence. On

¹ Special Eurobarometer 461, European Commission [online]. April 2017, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/787>

² White Paper on future of Europe, European Commission [online]. March 2017, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/betapolitical/files/white_paper_on_the_future_of_europe_en.pdf



the other hand, the Union will maintain its weakness in resolving disputes among members.

The second scenario is nothing but the single market. This scenario spotlights expansion of the single market aspects but excluding the cooperation in other areas. It underlines the importance of solving disputes among countries bilaterally.

The third scenario is that those who want more do more. This scenario focuses on deepening the cooperation among willing member states. The main issue that many members have with this scenario is the fear of creating a multi-speed Europe, where the “slower” countries would be occasionally left behind.

The fourth scenario is doing less but more efficiently. This scenario targets to deliver faster and more in selected policy areas, while at the same time reducing the number of common policy areas. This reduction is expected to help the EU27 decision process and give members more sovereignty in areas where they are not willing to give it up.

The fifth and final scenario is doing much more together. This scenario is centred around deepening the Union and the single market. This scenario would require every member state to do more which would mean challenges on national level, where nationalists and Eurosceptics would try to interfere with the integration process, and on European level, where the member states can't achieve consensus even nowadays.

3 Bratislava Summit

During September 2016, the Bratislava Summit took place. This summit was meant to determine the main issues of the European integration and reflect on past year. The reason for that was the accretion of populism and nationalism in member states and the Brexit vote.

This summit resulted in Bratislava Declaration³ and Roadmap⁴. The Roadmap is trying to name main challenges the EU faces and suggest very specific solutions. There has been significant progress on the Bratislava Roadmap goals since the summit.⁵ For example, the Paris agreement has been ratified by the Union even though some member states have not completed the legal procedure yet.⁶

The European countries tried to make a united front in the face of Brexit, but EU27 could not find a common ground, when for example the Italian Prime Minister refused to stage a press conference with German and French representatives.⁷ Germany together with France had the security and common defence policy on the top of the agenda. The main idea behind their policy was more active defence policy to restore confidence shaken by terrorist attacks.

Visegrád Group countries focused on few key points. Those were free movement, migration and reducing the power of Jean-Claude Juncker's Commission. In rest of the areas, Visegrád states remained open to the Commission's ideas. Main

³ Joint Declaration on the EU's legislative priorities for 2017, European Commission [online]. December 2016, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/joint-declaration-legislative-priorities-2017-jan2017_en.pdf

⁴ Working document to facilitate the monitoring and tracking of the follow-up to the Joint Declaration on the EU's legislative priorities for 2017, European Commission [online]. December 2016, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/working-document-annex-legislative-priorities-2017-jan2017_en.pdf

⁵ Bratislava roadmap, Council of the European Union [online]. December 2016, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/infographics/bratislava-roadmap/>

⁶ Paris Agreement – status of Ratification, Framework Convention on Climate Change, United Nations [online]. June 2017, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9444.php

⁷ Tweet of the prime minister of Italy, [online]. September 2016, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: <https://twitter.com/matteorenzi/status/776843952070750209>



achievement for the V₄ was the Commission softening its line on migration quotas and the EU's integrated defence in relationship with NATO.⁸

4 Rome Summit

On 25th March 2017 heads of the EU states met in Rome to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome.⁹ This summit was not prepared only for celebration but also for reflection on the progress since Bratislava Summit and once again for highlighting the main challenges of the European Union. This summit resulted in Rome Declaration.¹⁰ This Declaration openly states the open-mindedness to the multi-speed Europe if necessary.

On this summit the Visegrád group advocated for “better Europe” instead of “more or less Europe”.¹¹ In response to Angela Merkel's declarations, the Visegrád group also refused the idea of the multi-speed Europe and the idea of an inner circle within the European Union.

4.1 Election year

Even though the member states declared their will to deepen cooperation and some even wish for the multi-speed Europe, the year 2017 may be a deciding factor for the future development. Since January we have seen many elections, and so far all of them ended in favour of the European integration.

In March, there was a general election in Netherlands. The election resulted in pro-European party winning the election, even though the nationalist party in Netherlands (Party for Freedom) ended second.¹² This election showed Europe that after the Brexit vote and presidential election in the USA, there still is hope for a pro-European government.

Presidential election also took place in France during spring 2017. This election resulted in Emmanuel Macron winning a majority over Marine Le Pen.¹³ This candidate was throughout his campaign very pro-European. When Macron won the presidency, he even came to stage to give the speech with the European anthem instead of the French one in the background. Recently there was also a legislative election in France. His party La République En Marche! gained 350 out of 577 seats in National Assembly, which only strengthened Macron's hand in further negotiation with the rest of member states contrary to the recent election in the UK, where Theresa May lost favourable position just before starting the Brexit negotiation.

Another election is coming in Germany in September. This election will decide whether Macron will cooperate with Angela Merkel or if his partner in the EU will be somebody else. One of the names that often comes up in polls is the leader of SPD Martin Schulz. Regarding the Europe integration at first glance, the only

⁸ Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V₄ Countries, Visegrád Group [online]. September 2016, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/aktualne/Bratislava-V4-Joint-Statement-final-15h30.pdf>

⁹ 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties, European Council [online]. March 2017, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2017/03/25-informal-meeting/>

¹⁰ The Rome Declaration, European Council [online]. December 2016, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press-releases-pdf/2017/3/47244656633_en.pdf

¹¹ Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V₄ Countries, Visegrád Group [online]. March 2017, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/aktualne/Joint-Statement-of-the-Heads-of-Governments-of-the-V4-Countries-Strong-Europe-Union-of-Action-and-Trust-Input-to-Rome-Declaration-2017.pdf>

¹² Dutch general election 2017, Wikipedia [online]. March 2017, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_general_election,_2017

¹³ French presidential election 2017, Wikipedia [online]. May 2017, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_presidential_election,_2017



difference between Merkel and Schulz is the Schulz's beard.¹⁴ This is not entirely true because Schulz is willing to invest more in the Eurozone than the Merkel would and might be more forgiving to the south of Europe. Other difference is that Schulz is a "matador" of the Union. Schulz spent two decades in Brussels and Strasbourg, which gave him many opportunities to be recognised by majority of European politicians. For Visegrád group his appointment as a new Chancellor would also mean stricter refugee policy because Schulz is inclined to the policy of the Commission.¹⁵ On the other hand, Merkel would likely maintain the status quo.

Regarding the V₄, there are approaching elections in the Czech Republic. The future Czech Prime Minister and his government will need to take a firm stand in relationship to the Union. One of the factors will be a complicated relationship of the general public with the Union when only 35 % of Czech population trust the EU.¹⁶ Another factor is going to be the French election, after which Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka called for consideration of accepting the euro as he does not want the Czech Republic to be left out of the multi-speed Europe.

5 Summary

On the following summit of Visegrád group and Germany, the countries are going to face the critical questions of future Europe. Realising that the multi-speed Europe is becoming reality, the countries need to find answers they could not find on the previous EU summits. It is necessary to address the issues of the Union mentioned beforehand and find a common ground, because only when united, the voice of the V₄ can be heard. Another challenge will be to negotiate with Germany, which regarding the future of the EU, stands on the opposite side.

¹⁴ Schulz und Merkel unterscheidet nur der Bart, Welt N24 [online]. February 2017, [cit.21.6.2017]. Available at: <https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article162359220/Schulz-und-Merkel-unterscheidet-nur-der-Bart.html>

¹⁵ EU to open case against Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic over migration, Reuters [online]. June 2017, [cit.21.6.2017]. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-eu-infringements-idUSKBN1931O4>

¹⁶ Special Eurobarometer 461, European Commission [online]. April 2017, [cit. 9.6.2017]. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/78720>



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