

## Europe Quo Vadis?

The European Union is probably the biggest achievement of the last decades.

But especially in the last time the European partners had to face a lot of problems like the financial crisis in 2008, the banking crisis and the growing number of refugees entering Europe and the problem of their accommodation.

Recently Brussel had to deal with the British referendum to leave the Union, called BREXIT. So did the project of the unification of the continent fail?

The answer is no. The aim of the six countries who started the European Union was to guarantee long lasting peace which worked out. Additionally nowadays European citizens can largely travel without passports and pay with Euros which also is good for trade. The British already realize that leaving the trade union might not only bring profit to them, as critical voices of especially the Scottish are raised. „In Scotland, we voted to remain because it really matters that we're in the single European market, because we value the free movement of people, of goods, and services, because our EU citizenship rights matter, as do our legal safeguards for workers, for women, and for parents [...] and if that means we have to have an independence referendum to protect Scotland's place, then so it be“.

Also young people between 18-24 years start to complain about the outcome of the referendum. „We are Europeans. We're citizens of the world. We didn't vote to leave Europe, but you're snatching it away from us, 16 and 17 year-olds weren't even asked. A 90 year-old has more of a say in the rest of our lives than we do. [...] Why does my future have to be influenced by a generation who can't see what they're receiving in benefits compared to a nostalgia they long for that can never be again? [...] The effect of this referendum on our economy will only worsen [the situation of the mental health services]“.

In Hannover, also President Obama held a speech reacting to the BREXIT. „I've come here today, to the heart of Europe, to say that the United States and the entire world needs a strong and prosperous and democratic and united Europe. And perhaps you need an outsider, somebody who's not European, to remind you of the magnitude of what you have achieved. The progress that I describe

was made possible in large measure by ideals that are originated on this continent in a great enlightenment in the founding of new republics. [...] You may argue over who's football club is better, vote for different singers on Eurovision, but your accomplishment - more than 500 million people, speaking 24 languages in 28 countries, 19 with a common currency, in one European Union – remains one of the greatest political and economic achievements of modern times.“

So what will the future of the European Union look like? Will the BREXIT weaken the federation of European states so much that others will leave, too and the whole project will collapse? Surely not. After the rising chaos in Great Britain other countries like the Netherlands might think twice about leaving the EU. But national populism becomes increasingly a problem. Parties like the AfD in Germany, Front National in France, UKIP in the United Kingdom and a lot more, which are right-wing populist and skeptical towards the EU earn an increasing support in their countries.

It is important that every citizen starts to understand that isolating from the international community is no more an option in today's world. Looking on the foreign policy, a smaller Europe or even a single country would have a smaller weight adverse the US, China or India and Brasil than they have now.

Also, the European states are already dependent from the benefits of the Union. They profit from trade, support each other in times of crisis and grow together as a unity. Many decisions have to be made on the European basis, not on national basis.

In the last year the trade Union grew a lot and surely this is one of the biggest problems, as it is getting more and more difficult to find solutions and to agree on something. Before other countries like Turkey, Serbia, Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Iceland and Bosnia - Herzegovina join the EU, it is necessary to determine and improve the main aims and to find solutions for the refugee crisis.

Economically weak countries have to be strengthened in an ongoing way, like Greece, Italy and Spain. A weakened Europe should not incorporate more states but strengthen itself. So, in case of doubt, a healthy and smaller European Union should be preferred rather than an overstretched and weak one.

It also is important that the members will still have the feeling that

they can influence the decisions that are made in Brussels and not have to give up all their power. This is one of the reasons why so many states think about leaving the community. They fear that they lose control and their individuality. The comment of Jean-Claude Juncker about CETA (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreements) that only the European parliament will decide about this contract did not reduce this problem. This met with a lot of criticism in countries like Germany and Austria. „However the future of the EU will look like – it has to become citizen-oriented“. On the other hand it is understandable that Juncker wants this decision to stay „EU-only“. If on a national level only one country would vote against Ceta, the commercial contract could not be enforced. This would lead to a paralyzed Union and a loss of credibility on the international level.

In contrast to the widely spread opinion, the future of the European Union won't be determined in Brussels. Not even in Berlin, Paris, London or Rome. It will be decided in the hearts and heads of every single EU citizen. The following months will be very important for the future of the Union.

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