

The crisis of the European unity, what shall we do?

The European Union, a unique organisation composed of 27 independent states, had made it through many crises and moments of political weakness. Unexpectedly, after years of economic prosperity and stabilisation in institutional and political terms, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century it was forced to make unpopular, but undoubtedly necessary joint actions aimed at overcoming the multidimensional crisis.

The crisis currently faced by the European Union concerns not only financial matters and the future of the euro, but also social issues, such as citizens' confidence in European leaders, EU institutions and legislation. At present, the European Union must face the most difficult dimension of the 'free market' crisis, which is the most severe to EU citizens, namely the global financial breakdown and the crisis of the Economic and Monetary Union triggered by the problems of several euro area countries.

Not only the economy and currency drive the European framework, but it must be supported by a new, purely political impulse.

The European Union is still based on voluntary shaping and developing the common political decision-making mechanism and merging countries and societies, reaching to our common principles, values, and loyalty of states and their citizens to the European Union and its institutions.

The European Union still has the objectives and problems it wants, should or must solve as integration participants wish. The debate on the ideas of functioning and shape of the Union as well as its effects reflect the complex structure of interests, preferences and prejudices of European integration actors, as well as the possibilities of their effective implementation.

European Union's complexity is the result of a vast number of its obligations, legislative processes and implementing procedures. Yet, the process of permanent internal reform and enlargement, as well as

an increase in external political and economic pressure, resulted in deeper problems of the European integration and thus gave rise to an even higher risk of internal differences in the European Union.

Therefore, the question about the future, about the driving force of European integration remains valid. Analysis of the dynamics of changes taking place in the European Union shows that there are several factors that should stimulate European integration. They include:

- the need for the European project to survive for the sake of achieving ageless objectives, such as security, prosperity, progress of civilization and protection of universal rights;
- seeking the democracy and constitution formula, and thus the EU's own political status;
- eliminating hegemony (or dominance) of one country over another;
- the need to constantly justify (or legitimise) the motives of its existence, particularly from the point of view of Member States' and their citizens' perceptions of European integration;
- improving integration-related solutions resulting from the organisation and management of institutions and procedures, motivated by expanding the Union's competence.

The identified factors of European integration dynamics allow attempting at forecasting the European Union's future development. Thus, there are several fundamental analytical positions:

- The first one assumes that the Union will grow weaker while the Member States will grow stronger. It implies the domination of the intergovernmental method and the reduction of competences of the currently functioning EU institutions as a result of the "crisis" stemming from undue strengthening of the supra-state and supra-national element. It could result in deconstruction, decomposition and even collapse of the European Union system.
- The second analytical position focuses on maintaining the *status quo* and continuing the gradual extension of the current integration *acquis* according to the principle of supra-nationality and the intergovernmental method.
- The third analytical position is based on the conviction that both the Member States and the Union will decide to make a constitutional "leap" in the field of integration policy, which in practical terms could mean the establishment of a federation of national states.

The positions described above allow to establish the following scenarios:

- The first scenario, referred to as a negative 'suppression scenario' is based on the assumption that after reaching a certain point, the process of delegating the decision-making competences of the Member States to EU institutions will be suppressed, and a process of subsequent stagnation

will (or might) follow. It is impossible to rule out the possibility that groups of individual countries would decide to establish 'thematic associations' in order to implement specific integration tasks.

- The other scenario, called the 'imperative scenario,' assumes that the model of European integration, based on the intergovernmental and the Community method, will be developed further and in parallel, without specifying the final objective of the European integration policy (*finalite politique*).
- Under the third scenario, referred to as the 'developmental scenario', the element bonding the ventures of European integration subjects is their conviction of the need to intensify integration measures. This scenario assumes that by continuing the correction and reform process within the system, the European Union will retain its multi-layered (multi-level) nature, allowing it to combine not only supra-state and international, but also national elements - inclusion of national Parliaments as a form of partial nationalization of European integration.

For now, the European Union must complete the most difficult process of restoring balance in its entire history. The process of restoring the balance of the system will be difficult and time-consuming. In the end, this should lead to the development of the new quality of European integration, whose shape and form would be adapted to the challenges of the modern world. We must assume that the European Union will find the strength to overcome the current crises and initiate a new debate concerning its structure, political system and future, as it has always done up to this point.

At this point, we should carefully consider the role and significance of national Parliaments and the European Parliament in shaping the new quality of the European Union in the 21st century and in overcoming the current European unity crisis.

Historically, in the process of European integration development and expanding the authority of European institutions, national Parliaments lost their influence on European legislation to other EU institutions. The Treaty of Lisbon introduced many innovations that resulted in a stronger role of national Parliaments and the European Parliament in European Union's decision-making processes. Thanks to the treaty reforms, national Parliaments are now actively involved in effective functioning of the European Union. The actual role of national Parliaments and the European Parliament depends on their readiness to fulfil new duties and ability to use their authority and make the necessary adjustments on the legislative, procedural and logistic level. Yet, the key issue is for parliaments of the European Union to have a clear vision of their

place in the EU architecture and of the challenges they are facing in the next 15 to 20 years, but also in the short run.

Considering the role of national Parliaments and the European Parliament, we should hold a discussion and find answers to the following questions:

- What should we do to prevent deepening of the integration unity crisis? What specific measures are proposed by parliaments to overcome the European integration crisis?
- Does the current situation in Europe/European Union require new forms/instruments/mechanisms of parliaments' involvement for building a new European unity?
- How would parliaments get involved in the debate and the process of working out methods and ways for the European Union to overcome the crisis?
- How do parliaments and parliamentarians, as representatives of societies, cope with the increasing crisis of citizens' confidence in integration and the EU?