A European’s viewpoint

The Quest for a lost European Project

BY DUSAN SIDJANSKI*

Man does not live by economics alone. Reduced by the crisis to the state of « homo economicus », we aspire to the political animal as rekindled in Greece. The European Union was inspired by projects based on our common culture, rich in its diversity. Its wings were clipped by the failure of the EDC and of the European Political Community in 1954. Deprived of its political dimension, the Union has evolved according to Jean Monnet’s strategy of integration, sector by sector. And now it has become blatantly clear that the spillover effect has reached its limits. The Russia-Ukraine conflict, enlargement without deepening, external threats and internal fragmentation, all of these factors call for a global vision. Caught up in the turmoil of the crisis and the dogma of austerity, the Union has become weakened by extremist movements. A sword of Damocles is hanging over democracy and the very future of the Union.

Contrary to the federative principle which prohibits any form of hegemony, the Union is subjected to the influence of the largest national economy which persists in its orthodoxy, imposing austerity to the detriment of solidarity. How is it that Wolfgang Schäuble has forgotten all about his political project of 1994, led by a « hard core » within the Union? And that it was replaced by a financial vision of no appeal to the general public and the young? Was it due to a Member State’s instinctive desire to preserve its domination? And why is it that France doesn’t assert its political clout to rekindle a Project likely to restore balance in the Franco-German couple and provide the Union with a powerful boost? Obviously a complete change in perspective is urgently required advocating real respect of values and a global vision in the interest of European citizens. My greatest wish is to see the creation of a European Federation in which Switzerland could participate.

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It is only natural that the Eurozone is called upon to assume the role of federative core since no single currency has ever existed without political power. Paradoxically, in its current form the avant-garde Eurozone is lagging behind the economic pillar of the Lisbon Treaty and its federal method. First and foremost, the Eurozone should restructure and adapt to the community norms. Equipped with an Executive, the core group would have powers regarding foreign policy, security and defence. These would be implemented on proposal from the Executive by codecision of the Council - to become the European Senate - and of the European Parliament. Denis de Rougemont had foreseen that regions and large cities were destined to assume a larger role within the European Union. Consequently a Senate of the Regions would be an integral part of the process. In this way local demands could be expressed through institutional channels, thereby avoiding regional disintegration.

The federal method would determine the external relations of the political Union, which would benefit from a common approach as opposed to the uncoordinated policies of the different Member States. This lack of unity is illustrated by a failure to see the big picture and a sense of disagreement with regard to Russia, and also by France’s solo military operations. The federal framework would allow the political Union to define its strategy in areas of common interest. Proof of this is the EU’s influence within the WTO due to its important role in international trade and to the fact that it speaks with a single voice.

Above all, this political advance would herald a revival of solidarity and a way out of the crisis. As maintained on numerous occasions by European leaders, including the German Chancellor, the political Union would enable recourse to eurobonds in order to fund large projects in the field of infrastructure, education and research, as well as SMEs and start-ups. The « European New Deal », in which Switzerland could be included, would see the light of day and at the same time the « European Dream » would be rekindled.