



Ideas

“ To revive the European Union, we must adopt a global approach”

LE MONDE IDEAS – 19.8.2016 at 14h17 – By Dusan Sidjanski (political scientist, ex-special advisor to the president of the European Commission (2004-2014) and honorary president of the European Center...

In an article published in *Le Monde*, August 10th 2016, Italian foreign and defense ministers Paolo Gentiloni and Roberta Pinotti, respectively, took an initiative aiming to create, by a group of Member States of the European Union (EU), “a sort of Union for European Defense”. This initiative opened the debate on the sector of sovereign power in response to threats towards EU security. Their proposition aims to create a “Schengen of defense”, where the objective would not be to form a European army but to pool capabilities and resources of a group of member states under a single command with shared objectives, decision-making processes and budgetary and technological resources. Launched by an exclusive group of which include the founding member states of the EU, this approach is, like Schengen, designed to integrate into the EU. Once resources are mutualized, the European defense force would be available not only to the EU but to NATO and the UN as well.

By instigating reflection and debate over the revival of integration, the Italian high authorities have raised numerous questions of which the first brings us back to the European Defense Community (EDC) experiment: its failure in 1954 led to the draft project of the European Political Community. The lesson learned: The defense union must not precede the political union. In fact, the democratic principle presupposes civilian control over defense forces.

The ambiguous relations with Russia, Ukraine, and the Eastern partnership, the conflicts in neighboring or distant countries, the waves of immigration or terrorist attacks, the fear of globalization, without forgetting the rise of populism and extremists of all stripes, all amount to an array of threats that endanger the existence of the EU.

A global approach

Under these conditions, instead of proceeding section-by-section following the strategy of Jean Monnet (1888-1979), has the time not yet come to reverse the perspective by adopting a global approach? Especially after decades of integration, the interdependence between various fields has reached a point where interaction is deep and often unpredictable unless you have a general overview of a European government. Faced with competition from both external and internal threats and of cleavages that weaken the EU, a vanguard is called upon to immediately open the path towards a European political union.

It is for this reason that the detour via an intergovernmental procedure following the example of Schengen must instead use “enhanced cooperation” by at least 9 Member States as foreseen by the Treaty of Lisbon. Moreover, the process that does not require individual ratification has the advantage of acting quick and being part of the EU.

A structure of authority

The creation of political union core would provide a governance structure that would guarantee long-term survival of the euro and euro-zone, the return of confidence and the end of the enduring crisis that, together with the imposed austerity, created the foundation for euro-skeptics as well as authoritative regimes.

These areas that affect the sovereign powers are outlined and subject to unanimity in the Lisbon Treaty. Even the obligation of democratic values yields to the temptation of authoritarian regimes in Hungary and Poland in complete disregard for democratic principles. Where has the EU promise of peace, prosperity and democracy gone?

Hence the need to redirect the perspective towards political integration in a unifying core resorting immediately to “enhanced cooperation” engaging euro-zone member states. This path offers several advantages: the quick creation of a unifying core within the Union, the use of existing institutions adapted to the dimensions of the political union, preferably reinforced and carried out by a qualified majority, all while having its own budget.

The federations that have succeeded owe their success to the existence of a unifying core capable of driving the other members. According to the proposition of the Italian ministers, it would be composed of founding member states driven by the troika of France, Germany, and Italy as well as countries known for their active European participation. These are just a few aspects of the project undertaken by a “reflection group” open to discussion on the future of our Europe.

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