

## The European Union at the Crossroads: An Ever Closer Union or a Community of Sovereign States?

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*Zlat Milovanovic*

### Abstract

What kind of Union will there be after Brexit and potentially other exits? Will the European Union (EU) be able to survive its various crises, with immigration, democratic deficit, and its foreign and security policy, to name just a few? The crossroads we refer to are the decisions expected in 2017 on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, between the two concepts of: the EU as an ever-closer union forming an integrated state, or as a (a community?) joint (multinational?) organization representing fully sovereign nation states. There will be four sections in this paper: The EU as a permanent international organization; Political forces within the EU; Getting out of the crises; and, Additional EU issues. By the time of the UACS Conference, some answers will have become clear. We seek now to discover what they will be. Macedonia and other candidate countries have the right to know more about the EU and its future.

**Keywords:** EU crises, immigration, democratic deficit, foreign and security policy, functional international organizations, national sovereignty.

## Introduction

On 17 January 2017 Antonio Tajani became President of the European Parliament (EP) for the period 2017-19, following the resignation of Martin Schulz, President from 2012-17. Neither Schultz nor Tajani had much to say about the current crisis in the EU nor about plans for the future, and the 751 members of the European Parliament (MEPs) did not have any major questions. Tajani did, however, point out that the EU faced poor growth, strong immigration, dissatisfaction with governance in the EU, and the rise of nationalist, far right and anti-EU forces (Euronews, 2017).

This paper is about immigration, dissatisfaction with governance in the EU and ideologies and forces affecting foreign and security policies which would, potentially, destroy a “successful supranational project.” How could this “successful supranational project” of integration be destroyed? Speaking in Malta on February 2, the EU President Donald Tusk concluded that the EU was threatened by the Russia of Putin, by the U.S. under Trump’s presidency and internally by emerging political ideas of the far right (Mediapart, 2017).

## The EU as a Permanent Project

Given the rather turbulent present, predicting the future is even more difficult than in normal situations. On the other hand, the history of the EU has determined its future. We should remember the Founding Fathers of the EU, such as Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi, and Winston Churchill who were convinced that an integrated Europe would be there and grow forever. The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Commission (EURATOM), will be another occasion to remind us of this fact. From the original six, there are 28 member states today. The EU is one of the most active global actors, associated with territories and countries all over the world, with the candidate countries, with the Mediterranean Union, with the African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) group, cooperating with scores of countries and international organizations across all continents.

In the Project Europe 2030, developed in 2010 by a Wise men and Wise women Group presided over by Felipe Gonzales, the further development of the EU was defined as: strengthening and modernizing the European economic and social model, competitiveness, rule of law, sustainable development, global stability, MIGRATION (our emphasis) energy and climate protection, fighting global insecurity, international crime and terrorism.

The Report states:

- The EU Project should become a citizens' project;
- The EU should avoid economic nationalism, including in the area of services and in the development of a digital society;
- The EU should develop a strong political leadership of the Union...

Addressing immigration and the integration of migrants, the Report calls for a concerted effort “to make the EU an attractive destination for immigrants” [Sic!]. “Without migration, the EU will not be able to meet other labor and skills shortages. It will also see a reduction of cultural diversity and experimentation, a prerequisite for creativity and innovation.” The demographic extremes of a very high life expectancy and a very low fertility rate, will also have their effect (Project Europe 2030, 2010). The thrust of this Report differs enormously from what the present EU treatment of refugees and migrants involves. The wise men and women did have a clear concept of what was needed – not necessarily just from the Middle East but from everywhere! How did the EU arrive where it has arrived? What would a crisis of immigration have meant in 2010?

The Report was submitted to the European Council, with a recommendation that it be followed with the fuller participation of EU citizens in its implementation. The Report was well received, despite the financial crises at its conclusion. The gist of the Report was a closer relationship between the EU institutions and EU citizens. Citizens were asked to express their views and make comments and proposals. It was a nice thought but provided inadequate conditions for the self-expression of citizens.

The immigration crisis started in 2015 and increased in 2016. The EU countries were not ready for a growing influx of refugees and migrants escaping wars, insecurity, and collapsing economic conditions. Hundreds of thousands were risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean to a prosperous Europe. The institutions for receiving refugees and the resources for the refugees' reception were quite inadequate. Germany turned out to be the most welcoming, receiving more than a million refugees and migrants, followed by Sweden and France. The solidarity did not go far enough in many European states. Some of them closed their borders by building walls, gates, razor-wired access roads and similar impediments. There were various reasons for that, including the opposition in some countries to receiving Muslim refugees, of which some must have been terrorists (Verhofstadt, 2017). The quota system of the distribution of the number of refugees among member states did not work in some of them. Some states even claimed their national sovereignty in rejecting the acceptance of refugees.

A European Council meeting was held in Bratislava on 9 September 2016, the first without the U.K. after the Brexit vote. What was discussed there, among other issues, was the nature of the EU itself: a closer integrated union or a community of sovereign states with their own, national interests. Both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Donald Tusk wanted a new EU “narrative” before 25 March 2017 – in order to rescue the EU. The EU is to remain whole and united, but having the personal interests of each state in mind. We have to protect the external borders of the EU, and the economic and social interests of our citizens first. Not in 60 years has such a dilemma emerged.

Several major events contributed to the EU worries: Brexit itself, something unknown in EU history, and Donald Trump, the new US Presidential candidate. An organization constantly enlarging had to accept the defection of one of its major members while confronted with criticism from the U.S. – until then its major ally and supporter, that the EU was irrelevant to the point of disappearance. Trump was then only a candidate, proclaiming the need for each nation to stand for its own interests and contribute to the highest degree to its own defense.

The EU may not have been as successful as it had once been considered to be. To be saved, it had to be renovated. Guy Verhofstadt (2017) calls it: “Europe’s last chance: Why the European States must Form a More Perfect Union?” The EU will have to follow its own model of confederation or federation, similarly to the U.S. before it became a federation. Europe will need to be redefined, accepting into its membership those states which accept a federal model.

### **Political Forces at Work**

To get back to the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, its successful former President with considerable European experience, is a German socialist (SPD) who decided to leave the EP in order to enter the race for the federal chancellorship in Germany (2017). In the EP he belonged to the Socialists’ and Democrats’ parliamentary group. His background is clearly socialist and has been since his earliest youth.

The new President, Antonio Tajani is an experienced Italian politician, formerly with Berlusconi’s “Forza Italia” and other parties of the coalition. His EP parliamentary group is the European People’s Party (EPP), a center right European party, now reinforced by Belgian Liberals, who may be losing their group of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) due to Brexit. EPP and the S & D are the two largest EP parliamentary groups. They have different ideologies, but until most recently had a

working agreement on alternating at the helm of the EP. Together they have the majority of the MEPs' vote, otherwise divided into seven parliamentary groups.

Tajani and Schultz espouse different and even mutually opposed policies, and still they find ways to cooperate successfully, something that would have been difficult in their national parliaments. But even ideologically opposed groups can find ways of cooperation at a European level in much closer if not identical political lines. In a Macedonian context, what that means is cooperation of VMRO-DPMNE with SDSM and DUI (DUI being in the socialist group in Strasbourg).

The citizens who vote for the EP in their own countries are familiar with some but not all European politicians they vote for. Close to 40-50 per cent eligible voters vote, depending on the country. It is likely that most would not know the name of their Euro-deputy. Contacts between the MEPs and national deputies are rare. Within the European Council and other Councils are members of national governments, the Heads of State or Government, Ministers and other officials, even some representatives of non-political social forces.

The most independent body of the EU is its European Commission (EC) consisting of commissioners elected in their personal capacity, not as representatives of the member states from which they come. Once they have been confirmed by the EP and the Commission is in place, its members are all independent of their national governments. They stand for the EU citizens at large.

Looking at all these institutions, ideologies are less relevant than on the national level. They are more goal oriented, bound to create policies and apply those policies successfully in cooperation with the national governments of other member states. If the Commission stands behind a legislative proposal, it is likely to be accepted. On technical grounds, once the EC decides that incandescent lightbulbs are to be replaced by long life, energy saving and cheaper bulbs, the decision is likely to be implemented.

In those EU bodies where member states are represented, the opposition of one or two states may block the best possible decision. This is also true of the EU administration as well. For instance, the information about potential terrorists and their whereabouts is not necessarily exchanged among the 28 intelligence and security services of the member states. EUROPOL does exist, but it does not have all the information it needs to operate successfully. The Schengen system has the capacity to record information about who has entered the EU – but it does not do so accurately.

The asylum-granting procedure differs from one member state to another, despite the attempt to unify this system (Dublin IV at this stage). Migrant visas are standardized at the EU level but issued by each member state and only if the migrant is present in that EU country! How many lives could have been saved if these documents were issued overseas, by the EU missions or embassies and consulates of member states.

European citizenship is granted exclusively by member states' institutions, according to their own laws. By contrast, the U.S. citizenship is granted by the federal government, under one set of laws for all the 50 states! (Verhofstadt, 2017)

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While ideologies play a significant role at the national level, they are less apparent in international matters where a set of theories in International law and International relations often have a greater impact than political ideology. Here are the examples.

- a. Most International Organizations (IOs) are based on *idealism within a liberal international order*. The United Nations is an example of such an organization, the EU as well. Idealism defines an IO by its goals based on humanity and its survival. Ideals of peace, justice, human rights, solidarity among nations, are all included. Liberalism means freedom of states and citizens, common good, free trade, globalization, and freedom of thought and religion. The ideals and freedoms, once proclaimed, are forever, that is permanent. That is why, the IOs are permanent.
- b. Another group of IOs is based on *pragmatism*. They view their role as establishing and protecting practical advantages of international cooperation and integration. They support integration achieved through law. Building International law accepted by all helps present and future steps towards unity.
- c. *Scepticism* is based on doubts about international cooperation and integration. Sceptics prefer closer links with those countries that resemble them and collaboration with others principally where there is a clear current advantage. IOs are not forever, they are created by those in whose interests they serve. They can be abolished if there is a need to do that.
- d. *Populists and new nationalists* stand for full national sovereignty and full respect for the particular interests of every nation. They are against long term plans of integration. They prefer alliances that serve national interests best. Some populists are against social elites, against liberalism of any kind, against refugees and migrants, against mainstream politics. Occasionally, some stand for racism, extreme nationalism, national-socialism, and opposition to foreign relations.

The Republican Party in the U.S. under Donald Trump's leadership has some of these tendencies, and supports the so called "alt-right movement" and white nationalists. Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Front in France, states that "all people aspire to be free" and that they feel that the political leaders "do not defend the people's interests but special interests instead" (Le Pen, 2016). We should also remember Vaclav Klaus, the President of the Czech Republic, whose populism was new in 2009, occasionally called "europhobia". He thought that the EU had not been liberal enough, compared it to the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia and called for a "Prague spring" in the EU". He called himself a dissident within the EU. Together with Philippe de Villiers, the French Eurosceptic politician, he went to Ireland to congratulate the Irish on their rejection of the Treaty of Lisbon (Le Monde, 2009).

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There are some 30 populist or extreme nationalist parties in the EU countries. They have joined the anti-immigrant movements, inter alia in Germany, Sweden... Such parties are: Alternative for Germany, Sweden Democrats, Danish People's Party, Austrian Freedom Party, Party of Freedom (the Netherlands), Slovak National Party, Jobbik (in Hungary), Law and Justice Party (in Poland) etc. Some of these parties have increased their numbers and strength, especially due to increasing immigration.

In the U.S., President Trump opposes the acceptance of more refugees, especially those from Muslim countries. His Executive orders are now being tested in the U.S. courts. At the same time, he openly supports all those populist parties and groups in Europe, occasionally predicting the end of the EU. Immigration policy has progressively become central to EU policy as a whole, to the point where it can be considered a "make or break issue." Whatever the power of the populists, it is hard to imagine that they will be able to cause a Frexit, a Grexit or the break-up of the Union. The pro-EU forces are growing stronger and will not allow themselves to be unseated.

The EU stands by its idealism and liberalism. The most humane reaction is to be welcoming to those fleeing catastrophe in their own countries, such as wars, massive destruction, economic disaster, or climate change. It is also an obligation under International law, which applies within as well as outside the EU. Other countries should be helping the EU in their efforts... Countries like Germany, Sweden, France, the U.K., Turkey, Lebanon – have received a lion's share of refugees from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

## Out of the Crises

The refugee crisis can and should be solved as soon as possible. Yes, the EU member states should have a say, and they cannot be forced to receive refugees. The world leaders who gathered at the U.N. Summit in New York on 19 September 2016 – adopted *The New York Declaration*, expressing their political will to protect the rights of refugees and migrants on a global scale. They agreed to start negotiations leading to an international conference in 2018 and the adoption of “a global compact for a safe, orderly and regular migration”. They agreed, inter alia to:

- Protect the Human Rights of all refugees and migrants regardless of status;
- Ensure that all refugees’ and migrants’ children are receiving education within a few months of their arrival;
- Support those countries rescuing, receiving and hosting large numbers of refugees and migrants;
- Find new homes for all refugees and migrants identified by UNHCR;
- Strengthen the global governance of migrations by bringing the International Organization of Migration (IOM) into the U.N. system.

The Secretary General’s campaign to counter xenophobia and intolerance, was most welcome! (U.N. New York Declaration, 2016). Then-Foreign Minister of Germany Steinmeier (at this writing the President of the Federal Republic of Germany), called for fairness in sharing the burden. “We need to pursue a comprehensive approach linking migration, development and security... We must finally move ahead with tackling this crisis”. (German Mission to the U.S., 2016).

Does the New York Declaration apply to the EU and its member-states? Yes, it certainly does, as the EU and its member-states took part at the Conference. The EU member states are all members of the U.N. as well. Implementation of the Declaration is a moral and political duty, if not a full legal obligation. Populists may be tempted to reject their obligations, as some of them are already doing so. They can even call for the United Nations to be abolished. This is unlikely to happen, as they would not have the necessary number of votes, given that most nations still stand by the U.N.

Looking at the countries on the refugees’ Balkan route, Turkey, Macedonia and Serbia are not EU members – although the EU expects them to help. Greece is an EU member, the first EU country the refugees and migrants come to on their journey. All those countries are U.N. members but they have neither the facilities nor the resources to provide help for hundreds of thousands of people.



Positive International law, adopted within the U.N. (or even earlier within the League of Nations) – creates the obligation for signatory states to accept refugees (if not migrants), with the help of the UNHCR. An unlimited number of refugees is possible, for instance after the Second World War, Europe dealt with as many as 40 million refugees (Milovanovic, 2016).

It is fair to say that refugees in Europe should not be the concern of the EU alone. There are other international organizations which should be participating, such as: the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the IOM, the U.N. and its agencies, and the Black Sea Cooperation Council, to name just a few. There is no reason why Switzerland, Norway, Iceland – should not participate more fully. The need for more international cooperation is enormous.

Syrians, Iraqis, Afghanis, Libyans too, are still citizens of their countries, even if they are accepted in the EU as refugees or migrants. Ultimately, once the peace is signed, the refugees and migrants should have the right to return to their countries. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). Syria should be rebuilt with the help of the international community, especially of those countries which participated in war operations or supplied weapons to those involved in the fighting. Even by the standards of The Hague Regulations, countries causing damage unnecessarily in an armed conflict should have the obligation to compensate. This kind of rule is not easy to apply – but it would be absolutely essential. Country X which provides bombs to be launched from the air should either desist or be ready to compensate for the damages to country Y (in an internal armed conflict). Those who do not have weapons will not use them – it is as simple as that.

Another issue is the international aid necessary for the reconstruction of those countries that have suffered through wars. That is the question of international solidarity as well: Creating conditions for the return of refugees who are not likely to remain in countries where they are not welcome, or where they do not want to stay.

## Additional EU Issues

### *Democracy*

The strengthening of EU democracy goes back to the Treaty of Lisbon, “which puts the citizen back into the heart of the European project and aims to strengthen the citizens’ interest in the institutions and achievements of the EU, which often appear to be far from their day-to-day concerns” (The Strength of European Democracy, 2014). This was a response to various criticisms from many sides pointing out the so called “democratic deficit in the EU”.

Citizens are called to participate in the functioning and development of the EU. European citizenship is better recognized by the Treaty of Lisbon, which states that citizens are directly represented by the European Parliament – and that this democracy is one of the foundations of the EU (Treaty of Lisbon, 2007). The Treaty of Lisbon also recognizes, in its Art. 10, the existence of European civil society and proclaims a greater participation of citizens in the electoral process. The *citizens’ initiative* was also introduced by Art. 11 of the Treaty. The citizens can directly submit their proposals to the European Commission, which will then have to make a decision if the following procedure has been properly observed. The procedure is “simple”: a group of one million citizens from at least seven EU countries must sign the initiative and the signatures must be confirmed by a local notary public. Needless to say, no citizens’ initiative at the EU level has been attempted. In some countries, a citizens’ referendum can take place under easier conditions. This occurred in Ireland, for instance, where the Treaty of Lisbon was originally rejected by voters, blocking it at the EU level as well. The Constitution of Europe, proposed by the EU Constitutional Convention in 2004, was rejected by the 2004/2005 referenda in France and the Netherlands, at which point a number of other scheduled referenda did not take place (the U.K. was one of them).

European citizenship has so far been tied to citizenship in an EU state. With Brexit in mind, the question arises whether those who are now EU citizens can keep that citizenship in some form. A group of British subjects has proposed that their European citizenship continue as a matter of choice or privilege. It would be called “associate citizenship” which would allow at least free travel to the EU (even if a fee had to be paid for it). This proposal, suggested by Luxembourg MEP Charles Goerens, is in the British Parliament.

Finally, for citizens or non-citizens who live in the EU, there is an institution called the European Ombudsman. Any private person or a businessman having a complaint

about an EU institution can appeal to this Ombudsman, whose role it is to investigate and propose an amicable settlement (Fontaine 2010).

### *EU Common Foreign and Security Policy*

EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, came to Washington, DC on 9 and 10 February 2017. This was her first visit since the election of President Trump, who hasn't shown much interest in the EU. Mogherini spoke with several officials of the present administration and left the following message: The EU is asking the U.S. not to interfere in EU politics, as "we do not interfere in U.S. policy." We are a union of 28 countries and the U.K. will be with us for at least another two years. Today, she said, the unity of the EU countries is more manifest than only a few months ago. While the Brexit talks are engaged, the U.K. cannot negotiate any new trade agreements. This was all very clear, a message of independence and sovereignty (Le Monde International, 2017).

The EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was originally the so called Second Pillar of the Treaty of Maastricht, based on intergovernmentalism – that is the unanimity of member states. The European Council is the main institution which decides in this area, helped by the Council of Ministers. The Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 created the Office of the High Representative, to coordinate and conduct those policies. The High Representative is also a Vice President of the European Commission, in charge of the European External Activities Service (EEAS).

The objectives of the CFSP are to:

- Safeguard the common values, fundamental interests, independence and integrity of the Union in conformity with the principles of the U.N. Charter;
- Strengthen the security of the Union in all ways;
- Preserve peace and strengthen international security in accord with the U.N. Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the objectives of the Paris Charter, including those on the external borders;
- Develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

The High Representative is also the head of the European Defense Agency, while the Western European Union has been a part of the EU since 2004. The CFSP considers NATO to be responsible for its territorial defense – although not all EU countries are NATO members. Since 1999, the EU is in charge of peace-keeping and nation

building missions, policing of its treaties, humanitarian aid, EULEX, and the protection of sea and coastal borders. The forces of NATO and the EU are “separable but not separate” (CFSP Overview, 2007).

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There were a number of earlier plans on European common foreign policy and defense. Originally, it was proposed that a European Defence Community (EDC) be established, that it join the European Political Community (EPC), and that together they prepare a European Constitution. A Constitutional Committee did work in this area, in the so called Heinrich Von Brentano constitution. The whole project failed in 1954 when the EDF failed to be approved by the French Parliament (Verhofstadt, 2017). Guy Verhofstadt, then the Belgian Prime Minister, wrote a letter to then-British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac in July of 2002. It was an attempt to restart the process of creating a European Defense Community – after the EU “negligible role” in the Operation Allied Harmony (in Macedonia). At that point the idea of a European General Staff was considered. With the support of Jacques Chirac and the then-German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder (but not of Tony Blair), they decided to go ahead. In the spring of 2003, a defense mini-summit was held in Brussels. The European General Staff was to play a role within NATO, while being responsible for planning and carrying out the autonomous European operations. Troops from Belgium and Luxemburg were to be integrated within the Franco-German brigade, forming Eurocorps. Several components of the European force were planned. In order to get British support, a few concessions were made: the Headquarters was to be called a “strategic civil-military planning cell” and unanimity in voting was to be re-introduced. Not a single operation has taken place since this system was put in place. Verhofstadt now concludes that the EU definitely needs a *European Army!!* Eurocorps, established in 1992, should be expanded as a center of that new Army (Verhofstadt, 2017).

In February 2017, in an interview with The Guardian, UNSYG Antonio Guterres described the world as “largely chaotic.” He also said that a united and integrated Europe is essential to prevent its succumbing to a deepening conflict. He draws a parallel with the run-up to the First World War. What we need is a multi-polar world with stronger multilateral institutions. The UN Secretary General must be in the frontline of the defense of all the principles essential to the UN Charter (Guterres, 2017).

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Another attempt to adopt an EU Constitution was made by the Constitutional Convention. A Convention on the Future of Europe was signed by Heads of State and Government in 2004. The initiative by 25 EU states failed to be approved by the referenda in France and the Netherlands.

Why does the EU need a Constitution of its own?

Varied activities of the EU, from economic integration to the CFSP – are all pointing in one direction: The EU is a quasi-state with most state functions but not all the functions needed for a single federation. What Margaret Thatcher once called a “super state” would necessarily lead to a federation along the lines of an American or some other type. That federation would be much more efficient than the present day international organization.

The member states are often prevented from adopting certain measures just because a few states are opposed to them. The financial arrangements, including the EURO, cannot function without a Finance Ministry. In other words, there is no government behind the EURO, which is one of the leading world currencies. The foreign and security policies also function without a government behind them (there are 28 governments instead). The U.N., disarmament, development, are all national policies of member states, not of the Union. The crisis with refugees and migrants has also shown that there is a need for a unified policy, based on a single law (not 28 laws).

The EU administrative and geostrategic position makes it the largest actor in world politics.

### *Geostrategy*

The EU is much bigger than the total surface of its member states. The concept of the EU does not provide a definition of Europe. The terms EU and Europe are often used interchangeably. But distinctions must be made.

There are candidate countries that wish to join the EU as full members. Some of them are negotiating their membership, some of them waiting for the negotiations to begin. The waiting time could be as long as 10-15 years or more. Other states interested in joining the EU include but are not limited to Morocco, Cape Verde, Israel, Palestine, Faeroe Islands, Northern Cyprus...

There are Outermost Regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs). The EC Directorate General for International Cooperation and

Development is in charge with respect to the ORs and OCTs, as are the states claiming sovereignty over those regions and countries. Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Reunion, Martinique and the Azores are included here, as well as Greenland, the British Antarctic Territory, Falkland Islands, Curacao, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia.

There are neighboring countries with association agreements and partnership agreements.

There are members of the Mediterranean Union (43 states), the African-Caribbean-Pacific or ACP countries (74 states), there are mini-states in the EURO zone, there is the European Economic Area, EEA (3 countries), there is the Schengen zone with additional and waiting to be members, and there are bilateral agreements.

When the U.S. was formed, both the developed and less developed states were accepted as full members of the Federation. Later, some were territories before becoming states. Some territories were won in wars or by purchases.

With all the countries and territories mentioned above, the EU definitely has a chance, no matter how many exits occur. The EU will be a state. The EU will have its constitution, a democratic constitution, continuing its traditions.

### *Will the European Citizens Go for It?*

This is, as we have seen, not an easy question. There are political forces in the European Parliament in favor of further federalization and there are those opposed to it. Is it “the last chance” as Guy Verhofstadt maintains, or not? He has pointed out the urgency of the EU federal project. The EPP, the S and D, the ALDE, are the prime supporters in the European Parliament of further integration. If there was a vote in the European Parliament, those three parliamentary groups would already provide a majority in favor. Add Greens / ALE and, maybe, The European United Left / Nordic Green. Among the opponents, one can easily see Europe of Nations and Freedom Group, Conservatives and Reformists, Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group, all together with 156 votes. On paper there is a clear path but of course, it would not necessarily be that simple.

One challenge would be the existence of monarchies (5 + 2) and republics (19 + 3). A liberal solution would be to have the existing structure such as it is, without an obligation to unify the system. As long as each nation’s constitution provides for democracy, the form of government wouldn’t have to change, as is already the case within the EU.

“A federal Europe is the only option. It is both logical and inevitable. But that federal Europe will not create itself. We will have to fight for it. We will have to forge it with all the strength we possess.” So Verhofstadt dixit (Verhofstadt, 2017, p. 272). He also quotes the Eurobarometer which found that Eurosceptics from left and right, nowhere represent more than a quarter of the population! The majority of Europeans want more not less European integration. The average European wants a thoroughly reformed union that is more efficient, more democratic, more multifaceted and more transparent. Provided that he thinks about it, the average European prefers a superpower Europe, equal to other superpowers, not a weak International organization. The EU can go back to Von Brentano’s Constitution and adjust it to present day conditions. Guy Verhofstadt gives his ideas. The most important is to have multinational European lists in every country when it comes to the election of the Commission, the new Government of the Federation.

On 1 March, Jean Claude Juncker, addressing the European Parliament, defined the “five pathways for Europe”. In the first scenario, the EU would continue its present direction of the search for unity and solidarity among all member states, solving existing problems as they come. Not all member states will necessarily be able or willing to pursue this path. The second scenario would be less developed and demanding: a single market, internal security, solving the problems of refugees and migrations, more bilateral than collective decision making. The third scenario would be to create a several speed EU, in other words to have some nations do more together than others, as coalitions of the willing. Those who want more do more. The fourth scenario is for the EU to do less together but more efficiently, for instance, deepening the single market, focusing on research and development, as in digitalization and decarbonization, or other areas. The fifth scenario would be to do much more together to respond better to the global challenges. Make decisions and act more rapidly, have a single seat in international fora, build common defense with NATO, etc. (The Telegraph, 2017/03/01).

Each scenario has some background in EU history. Technically, the proposal would create several EU organizations and develop major differences among them. On the other hand, it could strengthen the cooperation of all.

As for the candidate countries from the Western Balkans, the door remains open, although it is not clear within which of the scenarios. The EU Summit on the Western Balkans is to be held in 2018 in England!

Ancient Greek states and their allies could have saved themselves through a federation!

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