

SESSION 1

Future of the EU as a global player in the context of the current changes on the global political landscape, and the role of national Parliaments

Background note

“We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat.” – These are among the first words of the Executive Summary of the Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, penned by Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and her team.

“The challenges currently facing the European Union are more dangerous than ever before in the time since the signature of the Treaty of Rome,” – states Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, in his letter to the 27 EU leaders from September 2016.

“Today we meet in Bratislava at a critical time for our European project [...]” – starts The Bratislava Declaration of 27 EU leaders and heads of state.

“Europe Is at a Critical Juncture” is the title of the first chapter of the Commission’s Work Programme for 2017.

If there is a wide consensus about anything at all regarding the European Union, it seems to be the acknowledgement of a crisis, in which the EU finds itself. Be it European leaders or national leaders, pro-European or anti-European forces, ‘elites’ or common people, liberals, conservatives, socialists or any given fringe movement, everybody seems to agree – there is a crisis, and it is deep, it is multi-faceted and what is at stake is the future of the European Union itself.

In light of these internal crises, as well as various external geopolitical challenges, the European Union needs to present a vision, a credible plan for its development in the future. On 1 March 2017, the **European Commission** presented a **White Paper on the Future of Europe**, which formed the Commission’s contribution to the Rome Summit of 25 March 2017, and in which the Commission set out main challenges and opportunities for Europe in the coming decade. The White Paper sets out **five scenarios**, each offering a glimpse into the potential state of the Union by 2025 depending on the choices Europe will make. As proposed by the Commission, the scenarios cover a range of possibilities and are illustrative in nature. They are neither mutually exclusive, nor exhaustive: (1)

- **Scenario 1: Carrying On**

- In this scenario, the EU27 sticks to its course; it focuses on implementing and upgrading its current reform agenda. This is done in the spirit of the Commission’s New Start for Europe in 2014 and of the Bratislava Declaration agreed by all 27 Member States in 2016. Priorities are regularly updated, problems are tackled as they arise and new legislation is rolled out accordingly. As a result, the 27 Member States and the EU Institutions pursue a joint agenda for action. The speed of decision-making depends on overcoming differences of views in order to deliver on collective long-term priorities.

- **Scenario 2: Nothing but the Single Market**
 - In this scenario, the EU27 cannot agree to do more in many policy areas; it increasingly focuses on deepening certain key aspects of the single market. There is no shared resolve to work more together in areas such as migration, security or defence. Cooperation on new issues of common concern is often managed bilaterally. The EU27 also significantly reduces regulatory burden by withdrawing two existing pieces of legislation for every new initiative proposed.
- **Scenario 3: Those Who Want More Do More**
 - In this scenario, the EU27 proceeds as today but certain Member States want to do more in common; one or several “coalitions of the willing” may emerge to work together in specific policy areas. These may cover policies such as defence, internal security, taxation or social matters. As a result, new groups of Member States may agree on specific legal and budgetary arrangements to deepen their cooperation in chosen domains. As was done for the Schengen area or the euro, this can build on the shared EU27 framework and requires a clarification of rights and responsibilities.
- **Scenario 4: Doing Less More Efficiently**
 - In this scenario, there is a consensus on the need to better tackle certain priorities together; the EU27 decides to focus its attention and limited resources on a reduced number of areas. As a result, the EU27 is able to act much quicker and more decisively in its chosen priority areas. For these policies, stronger tools are given to the EU27 to directly implement and enforce collective decisions, as it does today in competition policy or for banking supervision. Elsewhere, the EU27 stops acting or does less.
- **Scenario 5: Doing Much More Together**
 - In this scenario, there is consensus that neither the EU27 as it is, nor European countries on their own, are well equipped enough to face the challenges of the day, thus Member States decide to share more power, resources and decision-making across the board. As a result, cooperation between all Member States goes further than ever before in all domains. Similarly, the euro area is strengthened with the clear understanding that whatever is beneficial for countries sharing the common currency is also beneficial for all. Decisions are agreed faster at European level and are rapidly enforced.

On 16 September 2016, the heads of state or government of the EU27 met in Bratislava for an informal summit to begin a political reflection on further development of the European Union. The leaders agreed on the **Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap**, which guided the actions of the European Union for the following months, culminating at the Rome summit in March 2017. The objectives set out in the Bratislava Declaration included:

- restoring full control of the external borders,
- ensuring internal security and fighting terrorism,
- strengthening EU cooperation on external security and defence,
- boosting the single market and offering better opportunities for young Europeans.

Following the signing of the Bratislava Declaration, the European Union and its institutions managed, among other things, to launch the European Border and Coast Guard (6 October 2016), to ratify the Paris Agreement (5 October 2016), to sign the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (30 October), to adopt conclusions setting out the way forward

on the future development of EU security and defence policy (14 November), and to agree to extend the European Fund for Strategic Investment (6 December). The leaders of the EU 27 met again at Malta on 3 February 2017, where they agreed on measures to stem the flow of irregular migrants from Libya to Italy.

On 25 March 2017, the **60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties** was celebrated in Rome. This was an occasion to conclude the political reflection, which started in Bratislava, and to provide a vision and a commitment regarding the future of the European Union. The leaders of the EU27 declared that, aware of the concerns of the citizens, they commit the **Rome Agenda** and pledged to work towards: (2)

- **A safe and secure Europe:** a Union where all citizens feel safe and can move freely, where our external borders are secured, with an efficient, responsible and sustainable migration policy, respecting international norms; a Europe determined to fight terrorism and organised crime.
- **A prosperous and sustainable Europe:** a Union which creates growth and jobs; a Union where a strong, connected and developing Single Market, embracing technological transformation, and a stable and further strengthened single currency open avenues for growth, cohesion, competitiveness, innovation and exchange, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises; a Union promoting sustained and sustainable growth, through investment, structural reforms and working towards completing the Economic and Monetary Union; a Union where economies converge; a Union where energy is secure and affordable and the environment clean and safe.
- **A social Europe:** a Union which, based on sustainable growth, promotes economic and social progress as well as cohesion and convergence, while upholding the integrity of the internal market; a Union taking into account the diversity of national systems and the key role of social partners; a Union which promotes equality between women and men as well as rights and equal opportunities for all; a Union which fights unemployment, discrimination, social exclusion and poverty; a Union where young people receive the best education and training and can study and find jobs across the continent; a Union which preserves our cultural heritage and promotes cultural diversity.
- **A stronger Europe on the global scene:** a Union further developing existing partnerships, building new ones and promoting stability and prosperity in its immediate neighbourhood to the east and south, but also in the Middle East and across Africa and globally; a Union ready to take more responsibilities and to assist in creating a more competitive and integrated defence industry; a Union committed to strengthening its common security and defence, also in cooperation and complementarity with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, taking into account national circumstances and legal commitments; a Union engaged in the United Nations and standing for a rules-based multilateral system, proud of its values and protective of its people, promoting free and fair trade and a positive global climate policy.

Following last year's referendum, on 29 March 2017, the United Kingdom did indeed formally invoke Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, thus beginning the process of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. Since this is the first time in the European Union's 60 years of existence that such a withdrawal happens, it is quite difficult – if not impossible – to properly assess all the ramifications this event will cause for the future of the EU. However, it is obvious that the impact will be long lasting, and it will profoundly affect the European geopolitical landscape.

The other major and possibly politically paradigm-shifting event of 2016 was the election of the new president of the United States. While recognising the European Union's partnership and alliance with the United States, the strong historic, cultural and political ties between our Unions, the potential changes in the nature of the United States' engagement in global affairs (climate

and energy policies, international trade, fight against terrorism, international relations more generally) cannot go unnoticed, and the European Union must be prepared to address these changes.

The Role of National Parliaments

Keeping in mind the forum, that is the Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments, the focus of the debate should appropriately reflect on the role of the national Parliaments and the European Parliament in these mostly foreign policy related issues. The Speakers are encouraged to share their experiences and best practices in shaping their respective governments' positions on the future of the European Union, as well as in controlling and shaping foreign policy in their respective Parliaments.

The session would also like to follow up on the interesting debate initiated by the Dutch Presidency at their Plenary COSAC meeting, which is the role and importance of parliamentary diplomacy. According to the Foreign Policy Journal, the intervention and involvement of Parliaments in foreign policy issues occurs at two levels: (3)

1. At the institutional level, especially in three particular contexts:
 - a. In the legislative process: with the ratification of international treaties and enactment of laws relating to the sovereignty, security, and state security.
 - b. Under the usual parliamentary control: the use of means at their disposal (questions, preliminary hearings, committees, censure).
 - c. Within the broader political role: the holding of meetings and discussions on foreign affairs on various occasions (e.g. submission of program statements, pre-agenda discussion and approval of the budget).
2. At the diplomatic level: There are four areas of intervention of the Parliaments:
 - a. In bilateral diplomacy, which aims to strengthen cooperation with other Parliaments and thus to strengthen the ties of people. The development of this sector contributes to the broader strengthening of relations among countries.
 - b. In multilateral diplomacy, which is developed in Parliaments through parliamentary delegations, either in parliamentary meetings of international organizations (Council of Europe, NATO, OSCE, BSEC), or in international parliamentary bodies. Such meetings are regional in nature (e.g. Mediterranean, Balkans, Ionian Sea, Central Europe, etc.) or focus on specific topics.
 - c. In European meetings, which may resemble those of diplomatic conferences, but have a specific character. They operate in a manner more or less institutionalized in practice and in the procedures and practices of the European Union (e.g. conferences of Presidents of Parliament, meetings of European Affairs Committees of Parliaments, etc.) and in the Inter-parliamentary Friendship Groups.

According to the analysis above, Noulas concludes that contemporary forms of parliamentary diplomacy operate within informal groups, such as inter-parliamentary, cooperative or ad hoc inter-parliamentary ones and they will become the sophisticated tools of progress and maturation of inter-parliamentary cooperation in a world that needs to be globalised, interdisciplinary, intercultural but mostly participatory.

Notes

- (1) EUROPEAN COMMISSION: *White Paper on the Future of Europe*
- (2) LEADERS OF THE EU27: *The Rome Declaration*
- (3) NOULAS, G.: *The Role of Parliamentary Diplomacy in Foreign Policy*. In: Foreign Policy Journal. Accessible on-line at: < <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2011/10/22/the-role-of-parliamentary-diplomacy-in-foreign-policy/>>, accessed on 29 March 2017

