

EUROPE: WHAT IS TO BE DONE

I. The decision of the British people and their Government to activate Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon and depart from the European Union is a historic moment in the political evolution of the Continent. The winner of World War II, a country that took the leadership in the struggle against Nazism and Fascism and a country which brought liberty to the European continent and Democracy worldwide, declared its determination to discontinue its participation in the political project named European Union. It could easily be discussed that the United Kingdom was not present when this project was making its first steps and therefore it is not unusual that it decided to discontinue its participation. Such an approach would be too simplistic, because what the people of Britain said was not that they do not feel European, or that they do not want to share a common future with other peoples of Europe, but that they do not want to continue being part of *that* European Union.

The European Union seems not to have understood the British declaration. In response to that, the leaders of four European Union countries met in Versailles and declared that the European Union may be composed of countries evolving towards integration for as much as they want, and nothing happens if someone wants to leave. Interestingly enough, the four leaders represent the lands and the peoples of the once upon a time *Imperator Fancorum*, Charlemagne. They implied to the rest of the peoples of Europe that having a common heritage gives them the right to feel as the heart of Europe and the legitimacy to talk in the name of the European vision. It was a coming together of the six countries which founded the European communities sixty years ago, plus Spain which then was a dictatorship, and minus the Netherlands, which again, once upon a time was part of Spain.

In a certain way, we are facing a strange kind of war, once more, between the two concepts of Europe, the continental and the Atlantic. In the 19th century, Napoleon proposed a continental concept of Europe and asked the world to let him dominate the continent, while at the same time he decided not to invade England. In the 20th century, Hitler did the same, who, again, abstained from invading England. Hitler had aspirations towards Poland and the east, after having occupied the west of the continent.

On the other hand, Great Britain throughout the centuries of its history had an Atlantic concept of Europe. In the 14th century already, the King of England who was at the same time a vassal of the King of France, started the so called "100 years' war", and ever since the British never left the continent. Duke of Wellington imposed the British rule in the battle of Waterloo, and the "D-day" marked their Victory over the central European powers, a victory on the battlefields but also on any other political or cultural level.

It becomes, therefore, more than obvious that, at least theoretically, the central European powers must be satisfied with the withdrawal of Great Britain from the continental European soil. Perhaps they can have Europe for themselves, while they propose to the rest of the European Union member states the “luxury” not to advance in the integration the distant relatives of those who deserve to share the boat of the European integration, in other words to leave them behind.

At the same time, it becomes equally obvious that the British Establishment feels puzzled and paralyzed in a country which seems to fail to have leadership with specific vision. The decision of the High Court and the other of the Supreme Court, as well as the position of the House of Lords gives evidence of that situation.

II. The question is what is to be done.

The European Union is the outcome of many efforts and policies, over the decades, of a number of people determined to bring peace and prosperity for all on the old continent. The idea of this project was conceived in the times of War, continued on during the Cold War and later was marked by the impossibility of the geographically western Europe to absorb the Russian giant and its interests. The realization of the vision demanded a lot of voluntarism from the politicians especially during the first forty years, while the peoples were left almost completely out of the experiment. During that period, which was dominated by the leadership of the European Commission, there have been numerous discussions about the democratic deficit of the European construction process. With the end of that period which had the stamp of Jacques Delor, one crisis after another mark the further development of the Commission, while the Heads of States demonstrated a new activism having as a result the shifting of power towards the European Council. The crises of the Eurozone in the recent years lead the Heads of certain member states to meetings and common declarations, mostly outside any foreseen procedure or institutional role. The European Union gradually became an intergovernmental organization and started losing in integration destiny.

Meanwhile, the United Kingdom managed to pay back to the United States all the debt created by World War II up to the last cent and was unable to understand why the USA was so harsh to them while they had levied all the debt of Germany. Moreover, according to the average British subject, this “unfair” treatment had lead to a new political reality in Europe where the winner of the World War II would be perceived weaker than the defeated country. Furthermore, insulars as they are by nature, the British could not understand the heaviness of the machinery of Brussels, which is mainly French and German inspired, nor believe in their transparency and effectiveness.

On the other side of the Channel, France and Germany were openly presenting themselves as the heart of the European Union, the driving force, and the famous Paris-Berlin axis, a certain perception that Europe should be exactly as conceived by the first six founding member states. This is something which is very evident in every occasion of the daily political or cultural life of the Union. The countries composing the old kingdom of Charlemagne feel that it is self-evident that their way of understanding the man and the world coincides with that of the European Union: their differences, cultural, historical, their mentalities, etc., as for example of Greece, central European countries or the United Kingdom, must adapt to their standards. A general idea was produced, since the days of the Europe of six that the newcomers to the European Union must adapt and be absorbed rather than contribute to a new reading of the European future in equal political, cultural etc. terms with the six first.

What happened leads to the answers to the question of what is to be done:

1. In the first place, it is required that the existing European institutions function effectively and in the spirit of the European integration. It is unacceptable that some states continue presenting themselves as the guardians of the European ideals against the others. Europe has institutions agreed upon in the course of the last sixty years and their good functioning constitutes the only way of the member-states to express themselves.
2. It is also necessary for the politicians to understand that we live in the era of the so-called "representative democracy" and Europe would have never been made if populism invades the political life of the nations.

The main invention of the English constitutionalism is representative democracy. The people are periodically called upon to elect their representatives, who decide in the name of the people and for the people but without an imperative mandate, i.e. without the people, which has to wait and sanction the policies followed by their representatives positively or negatively when the time comes according to the Constitution. The idea of representative democracy was reproduced and spread all over Europe by the French Revolution, which followed a central idea according to which the nations must be in the hands of the responsible few produced by a political struggle and to whom the fate of the nation is entrusted through democratic elections. The same idea was later taken over also by the Bolsheviks, when they introduced the idea of the communist party which would be responsible to act as the avant-garde of the people and guide the people towards a better destiny.

Up to about twenty years ago, the European experiment was progressing also because the politicians of the nations composing the Union took the decisions of widening and deepening it, themselves. At a certain moment, the politicians started introducing

referenda as a decision making process for reforms which normally cannot be analyzed and understood in public debates. None of the *referenda* that took place around Europe on European integration issues was decided, positively or negatively, on the basis of the content of the question asked. Each one of them was decided upon exclusively on the basis of national political discussions and issues, which was also true for the *referendum* on Brexit.

Greece, a small country which believes to be the heart of the European ideals and civilization, never used *referenda* for the adoption of European policies, because the Greek politicians have always feared that populism could harm the European integration process, so much needed by a country facing all sorts of problems internally and externally.

3. Furthermore, it is essential that a new culture of dialog and mutual understanding is created. The European Union is not the Union of the six initial countries anymore. When Greece joined the European Communities, it was the first time since the days of the fall of the Western Roman Empire that this piece of land and its people became again a part of the same political and financial family with the rest of the countries composing them at that time. Despite the small size of the country, a tremendous change took place in the political life of Europe, politically and ideologically, because that country had not shared the political and societal evolution of the countries of the former kingdom of the Franks for more than a thousand of years, moreover, because it was of orthodox religion and culture, and had never forgotten the looting of Constantinople by the western powers, which led to the later submission to the Ottomans.

All the problems that the European Union is facing with the so-called Visegrad group are *inter alia* due to the lack of will of the Europe of six to elaborate policies in true equality with the newcomers. The Visegrad group countries demonstrate a difficulty of comprehending the way things are done in the European Union, while on the other side, the Europe of six demonstrates no flexibility in understanding those countries which have a different historical and cultural background and perhaps need time to enjoy their independence before they lose it again. Unlike what is commonly said, the Visegrad countries should not be understood as wishing weaken their participation in the European dream, what they want is only to be understood along with their peculiarities.

4. Brexit should be seen as an opportunity for further developing new grounds of the European Union, not for letting the United Kingdom go.

The British decision to start negotiations with the European Union constitutes an occasion for the central European powers to get rid of the United Kingdom and monopolize the European experiment, should they want to see it that way. At the same time it creates a danger to smaller countries which all have interest that the European

Union is governed through an *equilibrium* of more countries with an international leverage. The United Kingdom is a nuclear power, the heart of the Commonwealth and a member of the Security Council. Its withdrawal from the European instances will be surely felt very heavily.

There is still time to use the Brexit discussions for creating a new European Union, with characteristics which would respond to the British fears and negation. The British Establishment has already given evidence that they would be willing to contribute to such an effort. Continental Europe must understand that History teaches us that it is useful to accommodate the United Kingdom, the country which saved every single European state from slavery and barbarism and provided democratic institutions to all.

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