

***Professor Danuta Hübner, Ph.D.***  
***Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs***  
***in the European Parliament***

***The Future of EU after Brexit***

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In nine months the UK will become a third country. I cannot say that it does not matter for the EU. But I can say that we started to integrate Europe in fifties without the Brits and after 45 years of “sharing Europe” with them we will continue without the Brits.

A big state is leaving. It will change balance of power within the Union. It will, in particular, influence the economic and political weight of the non-euro member states. Smaller states will have to spend more effort on building coalitions. Political center will move farther towards euro zone. The relationship regarding decision making between euro and non-euro group will get a new dimension. 85% of the European GDP will come from euro zone economies.

EU continues to be under pressure of internal and external factors calling for change. There is both the need of change and political will to continue reforms, in particular when it comes to the euro zone.

One can say that as usual we have three options. We can agree on relaunching Europe, make brave steps forward in many areas requiring change. There is the possibility of allowing forces linked to migration challenge to break Europe and dismantle what we have built together so far. I trust this is not an option but the risk is there. Or we can continue EU favourite way forward which is consolidation or, as some say, a dynamic consolidation. The upcoming European Council will bring solutions most likely built on the consolidation logic. I hope political leaders will see it with clarity that we are living times when Europe cannot be taken for granted. It has to be taken care of and not driven by nationalistic populism.

Global environment is full of scary political moments. We have not been for a while in an equally bad and complex security environment. One cannot exclude the chance

of reelection of president Trump. That makes Europe responsible for keeping the West and its political values alive.

But of course we are challenged from within and from outside. And we have no other option but to take those challenges seriously. The moments we live globally gives us also a chance to strengthen our global role.

We see so far a strong unity within the Union's political structures around Brexit issues. But there are rather pivotal issues around on which we are divided. And citizens see it on TV screens and in social media. I think here first of all of migration.

On foreign and security policy, there are efforts to move forward, including common defense capabilities. Russian sanctions extension will test the unity. But the global environment matters not only regarding security.

Global economy has always been a space of close cooperation across the Atlantic. American administration does not share with us anymore common political values, importance of openness, multilateralism, cooperation on trade and investment. This adds new challenges to the already very complex security environment.

But Europe cannot move forward without citizens' engagement. Public opinion polls tell us that 46% of European citizens feel they are listened to by politicians. This level has never been so high in the history of European integration. But we have to ask ourselves the question who citizens believe listen to them. It might be populists with, as it is usually in Europe, nationalist preferences, producing xenophobic fears, enhancing anti-European emotions. Whatever hides behind the 46%, I believe we should spare no effort to take European citizens away from populists and invest more political capital in building Europe from below, together with citizens, local communities, civil society.

Politicians are responsive only to voters. Only citizens can push politicians toward European unity, European solidarity, European solutions to problems that can be more efficiently solved at European level.

Next elections to the European Parliament, bringing new European Commission are approaching. There will be electoral campaigns at European and national levels. Lack of political cohesion can lead to political narratives which will take us toward

deeper divisions. In particular in times when we witness very divisive efforts to reopen European history by some political forces.

So, indeed, Europe cannot be taken for granted.