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"Europe, a Leap into Unknown"

Presentation of the book: "Europe, a Leap into Unknown" and discussion on historical lessons for Europe's future
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I am a Pole. Even if my major concern is the future, I cannot forget the fact that EU emerged from the ashes of war, which put an indelible mark on the generation of the Founding fathers of the EU. As a result of their personal and generational experience, EU came into being as a promise of peace and better life to the peoples of Europe: no more war.

And, in fact, over the subsequent decades, the European Union has delivered on that promise—the high rate of economic growth was going hand in hand with the expanding welfare state model in most of the member states.

The first 50 years was, in historical terms, an astounding success.

But I think that over time, legitimacy of European integration derived less from the origins of the small European Community, and more from its functionality: particular policies that have had visible effects on the economic life and institutional durability. Common Agricultural Policy, fisheries policies, regional policy, growing roles of the European Parliament and the ECJ have played an enormous role in legitimizing the expanding Union in the eyes of its citizens.

The EU legitimized itself according to the primacy of democracy over philosophy, as elucidated by Richard Rorty's: *What* we do is more important than *why* we do it. „*Why*” was important for Schuman, Monnet and other Fathers, but for the sons and daughters „*what*” became more urgent.

The *ethos* of the beginning became less important – and less known, for that matter - than the measurable *facts*.

But I think so happens with all the institutions when the sons (and daughters) take over the reins.

But then, it changes with the grandsons and the granddaughters. They turn again to the origins, for they feel that the legitimization by ‘*what we do*’ is not enough.

Especially since the pragmatic, overly technocratic model, concentrated on policies and their results was hit hard by the crisis. The author of this book, Victoria Martin de la Torre belongs to that generation of granddaughters of the EU. And she is looking back, to that heroic time when the creation of community of nations under the conditions of sustainable peace was indeed a leap into the unknown, She puts forward her idea of Europe and how it survived the confrontation with the realities. She writes that *„being inside the cold EU’s civil service I understood why Jacques Delors believed that Europe needs a soul”*.

We may ask actually why we do not have any expectation of any other organization of having a soul? Somehow nobody ever talked about the United Nation’s ‘need for having a soul.

At the forum of the UN we present our interests and values, but it is only, for better or worse, a mechanism for getting consensus. The EU is something altogether different-it is more than an organization, more than an institution, more than a playground for our interests. It is a *space* where we, as citizens of Europe, invest in our future and the future of those who come after us.

Despite all the hits taken in recent years, EU is still the „object of desire” for those countries that are outside it. We saw it in the Ukraine in a very special way.

This is why it is so very important that the EU can legitimize itself by returning to *„why”*, to the fundamental values that had driven the first years of its existence.

Every generation has the right and duty to write its own new narrative that would bring back the memories seen through the glasses of the new generation of the beginnings and make it fresh to the incoming generations of Europeans from West and from East. Also today we need convincing storytelling of how European Union came about, why it changed history of Europe and why it is important that we do not lose it.

The book of Ms. Victoria Martin dela Torre is such a narrative. It is written with painstaking research, but it is not a dusty tome. It has the immediacy of its narrative and an immersive power, in which elderly men at the genesis of the EU - some of them known as pretty dreary, like, for example Konrad Adenauer –become the heroes, the Iron Men of their time, but also people with their family life, with personal characteristics. Realistic dreamers. Prometheuses with a human touch.

To conclude, having read this book, we would no longer think of Europe as depersonalized entity without a „soul”. The author’s intention was to imprint in our mind the importance of those first stages of European integration and the personalities behind them. Now, we have to think what is their legacy for tomorrow and how we should continue what they started.