

**Danuta Hübner**  
**Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament**

**" Future of the European Union "**

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When I ask myself the question where the Union stands today, my worry is that it is drifting, driven by events, by the multiple crises rather than being shaped by long term strategy and political decisions. My worry is that far too often the Union is reacting to what happens instead of being proactive. This has been true in the context of the numerous crises to respond to which for a number of reasons the European institutions had not been prepared. But this has also been the reality in the case of president Putin's activities.

It is by all means useful to reflect on where we stand today, what is wrong with Europe, why decision makers do not do what is needed but rather what is politically feasible. It is legitimate to identify factors which are behind the fragile unity of the European Union.

Lack of trust continues to be an underlying factor behind major weaknesses of the Union 2016. Rather lengthy history of the current crises which seem to be rather independent from each other still reinforcing each other has contributed a lot to the overwhelming lack of confidence which undermines the capacity to deliver what is expected from political elites at all levels of the European governance.

Complexity of the crisis phenomena when combined with available political and institutional tools is another factor here. Crises hit areas where there were hardly any or rather limited European competences. This is true for the euro area related issues, for migration challenges, for financial sector instability potential and its links with sovereign debt.

The need to address issues where institutional competences were not clear has led to a certain dose of institutional confusion. An example here can be the way responsibility for preparing the EMU reform blueprint was shifted between the European Council and the European Commission. European Council agenda has been shaped not by a long term strategic thinking but rather by personal considerations and events.

Institutional confusion continues with regard to the outstanding challenge of servicing subsets of states. Institutions with competences very vaguely designed by the treaty acquired far reaching competences by doing .

Surprisingly enough, in spite of the seriousness of the crises, there has been a clear lack of the sense of urgency on many occasions. Recent example could be a notorious lack of delivery by member states on their commitments to cope with migration crisis.

An important additional layer of the fragile unity has been generated by the social perception of legitimacy gap created by tendency to address political challenges, combined often with social consequences, with technocratic responses. This was the case when new governments charged with anti crisis policy implementation have not been emerging from elections but from parliaments' endorsement only. A serious legitimacy gap has been identified in the context of member states with financial assistance programs. The fact that the ECB has been for years perceived as the only institution deploying far reaching monetary policy instruments to trigger economic recovery has not been helpful when it comes to democratic legitimacy.

Looking back at the history of the current crises, it seems legitimate to point to the role played by path dependency in shaping Europe's capacity to embark on policies of change. Reluctance to change while combined with the urgency of reacting to events brings a risk of petrifying the bad structures.

Crises have been part of the socio- economic and political situation for far too long exhausting emotional support for difficult, socially costly reforms. While on the one

hand there have been social conflicts, with people in the streets, at the same time technocratic or even seen as unconstitutional reforms have been implemented .

Growing number of European level solutions required legitimacy coming from European Parliament. This institution often lacked formal capacity to deliver the legitimacy due to the lack of legal basis or lack of European dimension in the citizens identity.

Legitimacy gap has been further accentuated by the institutional practice related to the expanding role of the European council in managing various crisis dimensions, invading legislative area, using opaque Sherpa system replacing much more transparent historic role of the general affairs council in preparing European summits.

Both strands of legitimacy, the input and the output one, have been failing on delivery, accompanied by a process of stretching the treaties beyond the limits to address emerging challenges. One can say today that any further move forward on reforms would have to go hand in hand with visible improvement in democratic legitimacy.

As crises have not respected national borders, common sense points to the need of reaching out to European solutions for many outstanding problems. These solutions cannot be assured by simple coordination of national policies, even if unprecedented coordination efforts have taken place in some areas. Therefore, moving from coordination to new common rules to common institutions while at the same time ensuring democratic legitimacy of the change seems to be the adequate path toward sustainable reforms.

Fragility of European unity has been fuelled by growing strands of radicalization, growing on the fears, uncertainties, risks to security, growing inequalities. Reality of the crises strengthened populism, invading also the narrative of mainstream parties, absorbing ideas of extreme political movements. This process has been stronger on

the left side of the political scene where it seems easier to take up the radical left idea compared to the right side of the politics.

Fear of losing popular support and political power led mainstream politicians to avoiding talks on difficult issues. An example can be the treaty change or new treaty taboo.

It is, indeed, amazing that political leaders have not seen the crises giving them strong mandate for reform. That allows me to make a more general comment on the political leadership at the national level. Europe, indeed, has a problem of national leadership.

With extreme, radical parties finding their way through democratic electoral processes to national parliaments and governments, sometimes offering stable majorities for mainstream parties, political attitude toward Europe changes. There are examples of national governments, parties, politicians unable to think and act in a pro European way. There are examples of lost capacity to respect European obligations or commitments. This has dramatic long term consequences for citizens' emotional links with Europe, solidarity and common responsibility.

Urgency of change, competence confusion, lacking legal base, political risks - all those factors have led to shifting proportions between traditional methods of decision making: coordination, known as the least effective method, rule making and institutional change. Growing role of the European council as crisis manager contributed to the growing importance of coordination of national policies and resources as policy making tool. Coordination of national resources in the field of migration proves that addressing the most dramatic challenge to European integration through a soft method of soft coordination does not allow to achieve objectives, in particular those requiring solidarity. Evolution of outstanding crises has led to new tasks taken up by the European Commission, expanding its role in implementation and monitoring of policies. Also, European Parliament strengthened by the Lisbon treaty, has entered new territory of monitoring and scrutiny, moving beyond traditional dialogue with institutions like ECB, European Council , national governments and national parliaments.

Every generation of European citizens has the right to establish its own European narrative.

Every generation has the right to ask the fundamental question what Europe is for, why it makes a lot of sense to go deeper with integration or what is the common European interest.

Answers to these fundamental questions most likely cannot just emerge spontaneously. Debates are needed. Involvement is needed. When Europe is given to people it can also be taken away from people. Feeling of ownership of and responsibility for common Europe must grow bottom up. Back in 1957, personal war experience of the fathers of integration gave birth to the need of ensuring the future without wars. Part of Europe was on the other bank of the river and for decades could not participate in integration, but the door remained ajar and in 2004 people of central and eastern part of the continent joined integrated Europe. Today, in 2016 Europe can get its new legitimation from its external role. We need Europe to take care of our external, global interests where security of all kinds is at stake.