'Why we're stuck and how we want to get out of this'
Capacity Building for the Post-Brexit Generation

- Our Manifesto for a better EU -

With Brexit, the EU seemed to face another crisis. The EU appeared to be stuck, rejected by one of its member states and left to deal with all the problems the EU has. However, there are solutions to the problems of the EU. Brexit presents an opportunity for the EU to come together and be strong. This paper is split into three parts that will in turn discuss: democracy, social justice and the EU's obligations to the world. Then there will be a list of the solutions that are recommended across all three parts.

Democracy

When it comes to democracy, it is well known that the European Union faces several issues. What are our problems? First, institutional ones. There is a trend of a loss of trust in political institutions, including both the European Union and national governments. Daily concerns of food and shelter are more important to people than high-level politics and so people do not have reasons to defend the European Union. There is a distinct lack of transparency in some institutions of the European Union, particularly the Council. Bureaucracy distances those in Brussels from the five hundred million and more citizens living everyday lives in the Union.

Secondly, there are political problems when it comes to democracy. A democratic deficit at the national level contributes to a democratic deficit at the European level. European issues rarely come up in political campaigns at the national level, and MEPs can be too invested in national politics. The common value system is breached by many Member States who then point it out in other states without considering their own position.

Thirdly, there is the problem of how the European Union is represented in the media. In some Member States there is a misinformation campaign in the national media about what the European Union institutions do. The European Union is also blamed for every policy failure.

What are our goals for what we want to solve? To solve institutional problems, our goal would be to increase participation of citizens in the institutions of the Union. It is necessary to have more active and educated citizens to create a healthy and thriving democracy. There should be a stronger civil society with more monitoring of the Union. The European Union needs to be transparent to be held to account. To solve political problems, there should be more interaction between EU institutions and national institutions in a way that maintains a European identity. The EU should have a better implementation of the common value system. To solve the media problem, there must be a long-term culture change, where there is more debate of European issues at the national level.

What are our methods to achieve these goals?

To achieve the goal of institutional change via increasing participation of citizens, there are various suggestions. EU citizens do not know their democratic rights in the Union and are not familiar with EU procedures. This is being combated at the youth level via the European Parliament Ambassador School Programme and Euroscola, but programmes like these need to be available and targeted towards older age groups as well. The over 65s is a demographic that would particularly benefit from programmes like these. To increase the voting turnout in the European Parliament, a target of 50% for every Member State would be a useful way to measure it as a baseline. If a majority in turnout cannot be reached, that reduces legitimacy and undermines democracy. To aid this, voting rights should be

lowered to 16 across all the Union, so that more people have access to the vote and are able to have a say.

To achieve the goal of increasing transparency, decision-making process in the Council of the EU needs to be publicly accessible in order to be scrutinised. Access to documents is an incredibly important aspect of democracy. The public has a right to know where the money it pays is going. There should be EU accession to the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents in order to facilitate this goal.

To achieve the goal of solving political problems, there are various suggestions for solutions. First, there should be more participation of the national parliaments in European affairs. Parliaments should be able to scrutinise what their governments do in Brussels. A suggestion here is that national parliaments should appoint their Permanent Representation in Brussels, as it gives them more an insight into what happens in Brussels. Second, member states of the Council of Europe should respect and promptly implement the European Court of Human Rights' judgements, because respecting human rights is essential to maintain a healthy democracy. Third, the EU institutions should address Member States with respect for national and regional differences. There is a different historical context in each nation-state and region. Intercultural communication skills should be a quality needed for officials in Brussels. Fourth, language barriers should be removed by increasing the rights of minority languages. There should be EU accession to the Council of Europe Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

To achieve the media goal, there is a three-fold solution. First, citizenship education needs to change. There needs to be media training skills in schools so that the future generations can identify fake news and propaganda when they see it. In the information age, being able to check sources and verify real information is an instrumental skill for an active citizen. Education should be changed so that it is not all about regurgitation of facts but being able to think critically. Second, the Member States need to make the competences of the EU clear to their citizens. What the EU can and cannot do to affect the daily lives of citizens is important information for strengthening European democracy. Third, the EU is not an institution simply for the elites, but for all citizens. All citizens should feel that the EU connects with them. The EU needs to make more of an effort to include everyone, by targeting programmes towards low-skilled workers without high education. Programmes should be available for people who do not have the means to travel to be able to travel around Europe. Experiencing Europe first-hand is the best way for people to be able to understand the European identity. When people from all member states can sympathise with each other, this strengthens European democracy.

Social Justice

What is solidarity? Why is it important?

Social justice in Europe must be restored in two different ways. Firstly, a bottom up solidarity among European citizens should be established. Allowing people to understand the conditions of the different Member States of the EU would strengthen the trust in EU decision making. Secondly, we should aim to create a top to bottom solution as well: promoting solidarity within and between institutions that tend to isolate themselves from EU citizens, while directly or indirectly ignoring the political, economic and social differences between member states. As a first step the different 'realities' of different Member States should be considered in any kind of decision making process. Thirdly, we suggest the implementation of more confident and more radical actions from the EU side.

The Communication Plan (2015-2019) has been established, but the EU still has not managed to become closer to its citizens. The evaluation of inequalities among Member States from not only an economic but also from a social aspect would make it possible to bring Brussels closer to all EU

citizens. To prevent Member States drifting further away from the Union, national and intergovernmental rights must be restructured and balanced in a way which serves the interests of everyone. While some countries would expect more intervention to their internal politics (from the EU), others would prefer the ability to make their own choices.

Trust in the EU

In general, people want to have a clear picture of the future but as policy makers do not intend to share their plans and views, citizens believe they have very little say in policy making. If they were involved more in European politics, they would finally not feel that decisions are being made on their behalf while ignoring their needs. This should and could be achieved from the very bottom of internal politics of all EU Member States.

However, Europe has been often seen as a community that brings nations together, first it should focus on bringing people from a diverse background together. Mayors and local councillors mean the connection between citizens and politics. Besides being in charge for their area, their responsibilities involve engaging business, industrial, cultural and academic leaders too.

Furthermore, there is an ongoing debate about how EU money and funds have been being and should be spent. While the more developed Member States invest money in the Union, countries which joined later and perhaps could not manage to reach the same economic growth seek to gain greater financial support. In some cases, these funds are not spent according to the right purpose; which arises the question if these countries deserve to be supported. Of course, they do need support, but a compromise must be made. To satisfy all interests, new, stricter restrictions, regulations and requirements should be proposed. If member states in need fulfil certain requirements, for example, if they can show evidence they need financial support for a necessary project, they would get a certain amount of funding.

Last but certainly not least, the migration policy and the inactivity of the EU in coping with challenges such as terrorism and migration have weakened the overall trust in the Union as well. Besides involving Member States and its citizens more in the decision-making process, the national opinion should be considered. Compelling the will of an intergovernmental institution (of the EU in this case) on a Member State increases Euroscepticism. All in all, by quickly and actively responding to crises while providing Member States a greater freedom in deciding how they wish to deal with these the EU would have a greater chance to restore respect and trust.

Education

As a consequence of lack of specialist knowledge, everyday citizens cannot relate to the EU. Education is one of the key elements of ensuring social equality and solidarity in all EU Member States. First of all, as all the 28 Member States have different education systems, the implementation of a shared, common education plan that promotes European values would be essential. Moreover, it should be designed to be capable of preparing people for the new challenges Europe has to cope with such as terrorism and migration.

In order to achieve this, the focus of education must be shifted from fact based lexical knowledge to a more practical knowledge. The aim should be to teach people how to think and act in real life situations.

Furthermore, all children should have the access to good quality free public education as a human right. Everyone deserves access to the same knowledge. Children staying in school could reduce the

unemployment rate as the more qualified and skilled people have a greater chance to find quality jobs that not only satisfy their financial needs but match their personal expectations as well.

When it comes to youth unemployment, there is a lack of quality jobs. Young people are forced to take up any kind of jobs in order to be able to pay their bills. Frequently, young people are unable to find any job at all because of the circular trap of needing experience to get a job, but needing a job to gain experience. Internships have served to give young people experience. However, while the original idea of internships might be very appealing, they certainly do not function in the right way. The goal would be to provide quality work experience to university students before entering the job market. In contrast, in most cases they do not get the chance to do work related to their study areas (or plans for the future) at all. Moreover, they might not get paid. Unpaid internships are completely socially unjust, as only children of the well-off are able to do them. Therefore, only children of the rich can gain the experience needed for a job and advance in their own career. Working-class young people are left behind and unable to gain experience to gain a job. This entrenches class divisions within society. All internships should be paid.

As a consequence of youth unemployment, low salaries and unsatisfying working conditions, people from Central-Eastern Europe have been migrating to Western Europe which has led to brain drain. In the hope of achieving better living standards people have left their home countries which increased the inequality gap between the different parts of Europe. In order to turn back this phenomenon, equal and quality jobs must be created all over the continent. Young people need jobs in order to live.

The EU's obligations to the world

The EU has achieved to establish an unprecedented long-lasting period of peace in the European continent, after the devastating effects of the World War II. According to the Global Peace Index, 15 of the world's 25 most peaceful countries are members of the EU. Our Union is an enduring institution in a greatly insecure and unsettled world.

In the modern world, however, the nature of security challenges has changed from conventional threats to hybrid threats, which require multidimensional and comprehensive approaches. European security can be helped by the development of a closer cooperation between NATO and the EU in various fields, as they are both responsible for the threats to European security.

The role of Member States

There are some dilemmas on the field of European defence and security that should be addressed among Member States. Member States are often defensive of their sovereignty, but threats are every time increasingly transnational and fluid, with no consideration for borders. For example, terrorism, migration and climate change.

There are different perceptions of threats between Member States and, therefore, it is reasonable that different Member Countries can proceed with closer defence and security cooperation and coordination. Every Member State should be taken into consideration in order to prepare a collective defence. The Treaty of Lisbon allows for this as it includes the possibility for Permanent Structured Cooperation between Member States. The European Commission has already identified this field as a step forward without the need to modify the treaties. However, it should be attempted that these structures would be mainly geographically focused, such as the case of the Dutch and the Belgian Navy command.

The EU's approach to security and defence should be integrated and be targeted at conflict prevention, capacity building and effectively responding to crises, with the ultimate goal being the

security of the Member States and citizens of the EU. A critical understanding of the EU's capacities for developing its role in the security and defence field is necessary in advance so member states realize the EU's potential in the areas of security and defence.

What are the solutions?

The obvious one would be a defence union, however there is no clear mandate from the Council to take a step towards a European defence union. The Commission wants more control on defence, meanwhile French President Macron has proposed defence on the governmental level.

An efficient solution to increase security is for the EU to have an arms export policy and a more comprehensive approach to enlargement policy. In this modern world with modern threats, non-traditional security ideas should be considered.

The EU and the world

In the last ten months there has been more optimism in allowing deeper integration of a common European defence policy than there has been in the last ten years. However, it has been argued by detractors that a common defence policy would be intruding on NATO's remit. The basis of European security are NATO and the EU. NATO has one aim: military cooperation and protection. Meanwhile the EU has primarily used its diplomacy capacity to solve problems without military participation. This fits in with the long tradition of the EU in using a broad range of soft powers to achieve its political and economic goals.

The EU relies on the US for backup when it comes to security. Given the current unreliable state of American politics, the EU should seek to ensure that its dependence on the US is reduced.

Geography matters, especially by the case of the eastern EU Member States, some of which are close to Russia or Turkey. Even though Turkey is a member of NATO its political behaviour changed dramatically in the recent years and so is a cause for concern.

With the Brexit situation, a new form of security collaboration with the UK should be a top priority. This is because collective European capacities would be weakened if there is no security arrangement when the UK leaves the EU.

The Migrant Crisis

This is not a new crisis. It has happened many times before in history and it will invariably happen again, especially considering the damage climate change is doing to the planet. Dealing with climate refugees is a future problem that solutions need to be found for now.
What is new with the current migrant crisis is the coincidence of the influx of both refugees and migrants.

There are two crises: the migrant one and refugee one. The migrant crisis has many causes, for example, wanting an economically better life in today's unstable world. The cause of the refugee crisis is because of the political, economic or social instability in their home countries. Syria is a particular example. Refugees also flee persecution to save their lives.

Solutions

The EU should strengthen the efforts of effectively using the EU's development aid toolkit to improve living conditions in conflict or crisis zones, in order to prevent uncalculated migratory flows towards its

Member States. In this context, it is especially important to continue working closely with its partners in the European neighbourhood and beyond.

The EU should tackle disinformation concerning the correlation of migration and refugee flows with terrorism. The EU Member States should ensure that no misrepresentations happen when their national or regional media report on the correlation of the migration movement of people with the terrorist incidents within the EU. It should be a priority to preserve a high level of accuracy with such related content and to make sure that the information is double checked.

No group of EU Member States can defy collective decisions concerning the migration policy of the EU. The example of the coordination between the so-called Visegrad countries with non-EU states, such as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania at the expense of the EU Member States Greece, Bulgaria, Romania should not be repeated. This move can be perceived as a breach of the principle of sincere cooperation between the member states, as explained in the Article 4 of the TEU, as well as a violation of EU Council decisions.

The causes of the migration crisis must be managed at the grassroots level. Conflict prevention has become a pressing issue in the modern world. The stabilisation of the Middle East and the Northern African regions is inevitable to get to a solution of the phenomenon of migration. However, no external solution is effective enough when we are divided in the EU as well. The EU is like a marriage in which the members must compromise with each other. During the compromising, it should be remembered that governments, especially the governments of the V4 countries, have other views on migration, and they have to be listened to. However, they need to listen to the other Member States without rejecting them as well.

European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the EU's relation with Russia and Turkey

The EU has a huge responsibility to make its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) clear and free from contradictions. The EU balances between its values and the pragmatic solutions toward countries which are involved in the ENP negotiations. The EU tends to try to push its values on those countries, whose social-cultural history are totally different, creating the situations of the superior EU and the inferior partner countries. The 2015 reform of the ENP was welcome, but it should be recognised that more has to be changed for the policy to be truly effective. The ENP must be equipped with evaluation mechanisms in order to keep track of progress. Countries change very easily in the modern world and flexibility is key.

The political situation in Turkey is turning towards autocracy. However, there are contradictions. Anti-democratisation has been dramatically speeded up with Erdogan, but many signs can be seen for a more democratic country with an insistence on rule of law and justice. The EU should take every step to support democracy in Turkey.

Russia has taken aggressive measures in recent years. Russia's geopolitical situation creates a sense of vulnerability in Russia and Putin believes that offence is the best defence. This actor still has a lot of influence in its' neighbourhood and the EU's intervention can divide those countries and undermine their stability. Caution is key in every action.

The national interests of Member States should not neglect the interests and goals of the EU. We should consider how in an ever-evolving European Union, the decision-making process will develop as it would prove difficult to continue with issues relating to the ENP or other issues of foreign affairs if individual or a group of member states relied on their national over the European interest.

Energy

There should be greater reliance on alternative energy resources and EU funding for relevant research. Energy is a commodity that can be used as a political and economic weapon. This has been seen, for example, in the blackout in Ukraine in 2006. The EU is still very dependent on Russian gas and therefore there should be a diversified origin where gas is being bought from.

In the near future, the EU should become increasingly interested to research on alternatives sources of energy, including the accumulated knowledge about renewable energy, in order to achieve greater energy independence from traditional fuels. There should be increased EU funding for the research and development of relevant efforts regarding green energy.

What next?

In conclusion, there are solutions to the problems with democracy, social justice and obligations that the EU has. There are various solutions that all parts suggest. First, the difference between the Member States has to be respected. There are different historical contexts and that has to be considered when deciding European policy. When the Member States all listen to and attempt to sympathise with each other's views that leads to increased trust in the European project. It must be clear that decisions are not being made on anyone's behalf without ignoring their needs and wants. Second, national interests must not supersede European interests. The European project means that everyone has to join together to combat the problems we face in Europe today. If everyone combines efforts, crises can be faced much more easily. We are better united than divided.

The capacity building week, entitled 'Why we're stuck and how we want to get out of this', took place from 9 to 13 October 2017 in Brussels. The participants were:

Dimitrios Asproulis (1994), Greece

Ákos Baumgartner (1997), Hungary

Ciara Campbell (1998), United Kingdom

Lorenzo Cresti (1993), Italy

David Crisóstomo (1992), Portugal

Dimitra Gamba (1989), Greece

Milena Hórvath (1995), Hungary

Kristina Kostadinova (1993), Bulgaria

Nikola Kožul (1995), Croatia

Agata Masłowska (1991), Poland

Cláudia Silva (1996), Portugal

Sameli Sivonen (1991), Finland

Sebastian Stölting (1990), Germany