

Saturday, February 4th, 2017

Thematic Workshops

A - Images, Ideas and Visions of Europe



The most optimistic among us cannot deny that today 'Europe' sadly rhymes with 'crisis'. Whatever has happened to the original European ideal? What vision of Europe can we still conjure up in this environment bristling with all sorts of contrary representations?

If we want to deal with the future of Europe, and therefore with its present, we must take into account all the changes that took place in the whole world since the end of the second world war. It stands to reason that the bases of tomorrow's Europe, if it is to survive, cannot be the same as at the beginning of the adventure. The major world equilibriums, whether political, economic or social, have been modified; our western countries have had to cope with a permanent in-between-two-wars state of affairs; moreover, the power of the media has contributed to the development of superficial communication, thus allowing all kinds of perversion.

The various representations which have been leading for some time to the very questioning of our belonging to a shared European entity all have their explanations which we will have to analyse and understand; there were serious missed opportunities in the first conception of Europe; there are now major deficiencies in its development and implementation; if we cannot show the necessary clear-sightedness, we will not be able to counterbalance the rapidly growing nationalist movements. More importantly still, we will not be able to explain to our youths why and how Europe is their future. It is the complete renovation of Europe

which is at stake, a Europe of Citizens, who will know how to share their common values and ambitions without renouncing their unique identities.

Indeed, what vision of Europe can we entertain and pass on, other than that of a community of responsible citizens, fully aware that they share the same ethical references, the same political expectations, the same economic and social demands and who are widely open to the outside world?

B – European Citizenship Literacy



“Citizenship of the Union is hereby established. Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union. Citizenship of the Union shall be additional to and not replace national citizenship.” (1992, Maastricht Treaty, article 20)

So, we have been European Citizens since 1992 and, as such, we enjoy a number of rights which are the object of envy for many peoples in the world; indeed, the Rights of the European Citizen are listed in articles 20 to 25 of the Treaty and are guaranteed by the European institutions; in particular, the Court of Justice of the European Union ensures that EU law is interpreted and applied the same in every EU country, it ensures that countries and EU institutions abide by EU law. Democracy and Rule of Law are the two pillars of our institutions.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU was proclaimed and validated in 2000 at the European Council in Nice and it became legally binding both for the EU institutions and for the Member States in 2009 when the Lisbon Treaty was enforced.

Dignity, Liberties, Equality, Solidarity, Citizens’ rights, Justice: those are the values guaranteed by the Charter. Isn’t it our duty as European Citizens to see to it that our rights and our values be felt, lived and enacted? How can we ensure that they are better understood, respected and implemented to the level of today’s challenges?

The European Union is a political adventure, initiated by the will of men, to bring together various nations with their tormented histories and to build together a future of peace. That is what makes it unique. That is why we must act for its survival. We must bear in mind that the Citizens of the Member States of the EU have had the right to directly elect their representatives (EMP) at the European Parliament since 1979. And although the powers of the EU Parliament have been gradually increasing, the number of voters has decreased from 62% in 1979 to 43% in 2014...

C – What measures to strengthen the feeling of being a European citizen?



The sense of belonging to the European Community seems, paradoxically, to have decreased after the Maastricht Treaty which introduced the status of 'Citizen of the European Union'.

Faced with this growing lack of interest endangering the European project, some ideas are well worth exploring.

In terms of institutions, the deficit of readability and proximity is often denounced. A better incarnation of European leadership, a more readable parliamentary action, a new voting system are all lines of evolutions which could bring citizens closer to the European government bodies.

The "*open, transparent and regular dialogue with associations and civil society*" validated in the Lisbon Treaty aims to develop citizenship practices at European level. What concrete initiatives such as, for example, the creation of 'European statutes for Associations' could be implemented?

On the fiscal front, if certain national rules currently exclude any harmonization measure, the question of a European tax -not in addition to local taxes- but calculated on a broad base, and for a consensual goal, should be considered.

In an open market characterized by increasing mobility of workers at European level, how to bring about the social harmonization envisaged since the Treaty of Rome in Article 117 ("Harmonization of social systems and approximation of laws, regulations and administrative")?

It all starts at school. Make students aware that they are part of a community that transcends national boundaries and that they will inevitably have to interact with another who does not necessarily speak the same language is a prime objective for every European teacher. Each and every student during his schoolyears should have the opportunity to participate in a European project. Teacher education should include a mandatory period of professional training in another Member State for all would-be teachers...

The Erasmus program is a resounding success but it only concerns 1 to 2% of European youth. What expansion of the harmonization of diplomas and qualifications could facilitate professional mobility and employability of young people at every level of qualification?

Without a common culture, no sense of belonging to a community can be achieved. Citizenship is the recognition of a common patrimony and a shared heritage. The design of a European citizen course from kindergarten to university included in all education systems has been the subject of many discussions, it is probably time to make it truly effective!

D – What can we do to revive the European project?



The question arises at the level of both individual and collective action.

At individual level, it behooves us to be active and ongoing witnesses to the European cause: seize any opportunity whatsoever (public meeting, conference, seminar, courses, debate, talk, chat, etc.) to set on the carpet the issue of European integration; make it clear to our interlocutors why not continuing the European construction and consolidation is a mistake that will be fatal for the future of our country and our children and that will have considerable repercussions on peace and balance of the world .

Collectively, this is the time to act so that the EU engages in policies allowing it to really continue and strengthen its construction. However, are the policies, which have been conducted up to now, going in this direction? For example, in the Eurobarometer, European political priorities are called for with questions strongly indicative of current priorities such as the environment and immigration. But there are others, more strategic, notably the convergence of social and fiscal policies or the creation of a European defense. And the question that arises here is whether one should be concerned first with policies or with governance issues.

Illustrations by Studio Tallon <http://tallon.fr/index.html#net>