

## THESEUS Conference

### Conference Report

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#### **A vision for Post-Crisis Europe: Towards what kind of Political Union?**

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The THESEUS Conference “A vision for Post-Crisis Europe: Towards what kind of Political Union?” was organised by the Jean Monnet Chair, University of Cologne, in cooperation with the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA). The event took place at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs in Vienna on 17 and 18 October 2013. The issue of a political vision has been at the centre of attention during the conference as well as the challenge to tackle its ambiguity, with a specific focus on the current developments regarding a political union. In this context the expectations a political union raises in the European Union and within its different member states have been discussed.

Following the THESEUS mission statement the importance of a cross-generation exchange as well as an interdisciplinary debate on those topics have structured the discussions over the three panels. The conference was opened with welcome addresses by *Heinz Gärtner* (Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Vienna), *Thomas Suermann* (Fritz Thyssen Foundation, Cologne) and *Wolfgang Wessels* (THESEUS Chairperson, University of Cologne).

The welcome remarks were followed by a presentation of a Background Paper by *Laura Ventura* (TEPSA, Brussels): “A political union: clear concept or constructive ambiguity?” [available [here](#)]. The concept of a political union is not new, it was discussed already in the 50s., but over the years its meaning has evolved. It was also included in the Conclusions of the European Council of 1990 and 1991. The crisis has changed the focus from a political union based on different policies to a political union aiming mainly at the completion of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). Ventura added that the political union calls for institutional adaptations. The president of the Union, a European minister of finance and the economy and a better interaction between the European Parliament and National Parliaments could be innovations, which do not require a treaty change, whereas a budget and a Chamber for the Eurozone (as discussed by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the French President Francois Hollande), are possible

only with treaty adaptations. She concluded that the concept is vague, lacks clear *finalité*, and has to be debated.

The first panel was chaired by *Gunilla Herolf* (Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences, Stockholm). It aimed at creating a basis with an interdisciplinary perspective for the following discussions. The panel began with a presentation by *Iain Begg* (London School of Economics) on the state of the art regarding what has been agreed to date in terms of a political union. The European Semester, first, involves National Parliaments' budgetary activities to be scrutinized at European level. This has been in some cases perceived as a *diktat*, whereas what seems important is that it establishes soft forms of coordination. The 'Two-pack' requires member states to submit a draft budget to the European Commission, which may apply sanctions in case its recommendations are not followed. The Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) establishes a form of federalisation of oversight of the banking system: the European Central Bank (ECB) could tell a member state to close a bank. Begg also underlined the challenges, which are coming up. Firstly, there are no EU tax payers but only national tax payers. Thus, when a national supervision fails, tax payers pay and if not, other member states' tax payers. There should be some form of the EU area budget but its purpose and funding are not clear: in order to deal with asymmetric shocks, it would also require a European tax payer. The second challenge concerns cross-border transfers and raises the question if we need a European regulator. It is a stabilisation argument, but what conditions are to be imposed? The third challenge is related to debt mutualisation, especially, the Eurobonds. The average cost of debt would automatically go down, however, it also gives incentives to 'misbehave'. Some form of institutional development will occur. In economics, fiscal federalism is a true model. However, some underline uncertainties in economic standards: fiscal federalism would not work, because of the top-bottom approach to its redistributive aspect. As a result of what Habermas has defined as 'executive federalism', the Commission is trying to take power from member states, especially from the national legislators and to impose fiscal rules and dictate how fiscal policy should be made. This approach to governance, which is now emerging, changes the idea of monitoring of fiscal rules.

*Jean-Paul Jacqué* (Strasbourg University) focused on the meaning of a 'political union', a term introduced by Pompidou as a substitute for a federal union. With different views and different approaches, the true meaning is a 'never closer union'. Due to its ambiguity there is, however, a positive *acquis*: the step by step approach. In this light, the first question is: how to share power between the Union and the member states and what type of equilibrium is needed? The question is not specific only to the EU. All federal states (USA, Germany) have to face such issues as: supremacy of the law, infringement procedure and direct implication of citizens, but the question of *Kompetenz-Kompetenz* remains in place: the EU cannot decide on its own competences. The second main question is: what type of political system for the EU is needed and wanted? The debate on political system has never really begun and it has only been focused on the representation of interests. Representation of interests should be decisive but raises the question if a classic checks and balances system should be set-up, with for instance, a possible dissolution of the European Parliament? Jacqué then discussed the vertical separation of powers and the question of competences in legal terms, stating that there is no need to change the current system, neither by increasing nor decreasing competences of the Union. A treaty change might not be needed to improve economic governance, moreover, when changing treaties it is nonetheless necessary to explain the necessity and reasons of the change. He concluded that it is

important to be careful when introducing institutional change to the treaties as it can have unexpected changes. For example, the European Council was not expected to have such an effect on the European Commission. A clear vision is needed when discussing the topic of a political union.

*Sonja Puntischer-Riekmann* (University Salzburg) introduced the question of a possible federation. For Brits, the “f-word” is a means to decentralise powers. In Austria, the principle is the one of decentralisation, and not centralisation. The terms do not have everywhere the same meaning. However, by continuing to integrate incrementally, people will hardly know about the implications. Puntischer-Riekmann discussed the state of art of the academic debate regarding recent developments. Giandomenico Majone has always argued against those critical vis-à-vis the democratic deficit as long as the EU is a regulatory state. However, today, he talks about the democratic *default*. According to Fritz Scharpf, the EU tends to establish the hegemony of creditors on debtors and is asking the creditor states for a sort of solidarity that goes way beyond what their tax payers want to consider. She added that there has been the agreement to follow the executive line otherwise, Europe would fall. The European Parliament has been largely sidelined when it came to negotiating the Treaty on Stability Coordination and Governance (TSCG) and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). It was a centralisation by an intergovernmental procedure. Now, a new vision to enhance the legitimacy of these decisions is needed: the constraining consensus has been threatening the Union. Puntischer-Riekmann eventually referred to the US constitutional/Philadelphia moment to argue in favour of a new convention. It should, however, not repeat the 2003/4 Convention, which has not conquered the Europeans’ hearts. If a convention was to take place, members of the convention should be elected in every member state. That would foster the debate in Europe. People would have to compete and present their visions. However, it could also be a very difficult process as it was the case with the US Constitution.

In the last presentation of the panel, *Ramunas Vilpišauskas* (Vilnius University) started by making two assumptions: what led to a crisis was not following of the rules, to which member states signed up; and when talking of post-crisis visions, a large part of the debate is about ways of solving the crisis. Firstly, Vilpišauskas addressed the causes of the crisis, especially in the Eurozone by distinguishing two approaches. According to a ‘demand side approach’, the crisis happened because the EMU was an unfinished business, especially regarding the lack of transfer mechanisms, which should have come together with the EMU. The other competing explanation is a ‘supply side approach’, which focuses on the lack of labour market flexibility needed to react to asymmetric shocks. The fact that wages were higher than productivity caused competitiveness problems. Moreover, the Single Market is still unfinished, and the single currency did not come together with a completed Single Market. Vilpišauskas then elaborated on different policy recommendations: the ‘demand side approach’ proposes to complete the EMU: with transfer mechanisms, Eurobonds, a European monetary fund, a ministry of finance, and a banking union. All these instruments have a common feature: they transfer resources. Another approach, which arises from the supply side explanation, focuses on structural reforms in the member states, reduction of fiscal imbalances and the completion of the Single Market, what should have been done long before. The last remark was made on the political constraints. The response of the EU has been mainly focused on how to implement decisions (‘Two-pack’, ‘Six-pack’, the Fiscal compact are about the implementations of things which are already in the EU law). According to Vilpišauskas, elements of both visions will continue to be introduced. The

reason is to be found in the rise of redistributive politics, or at least in the popular perception of redistribution. It is perceived as a transfer of money from the North to the South: public opinion is very sensitive nowadays and the redistributive aspect has been more and more important. In this light we should also pay more attention to domestic politics. There is no permissive consensus for elites as it used to be and they have to take public opinion more and more into account.

In the following debate, *Brigid Laffan* (European University Institute, Florence) highlighted the pitfalls of an elected convention. She argued that currently the dangers are the Euroscepticism (those fundamentally against Europe are more powerful than ever) and a tendency to think normatively that we can do better. *Puntscher-Riekmann* argued that the discussion on the end of a permissive consensus is different than in the 90s. The political question about legitimacy remains: who defines legitimately the course of action?

During the second panel session, chaired by *Hanspeter Neuhold* (University of Vienna), an overview of different national views and expectations on a political union was presented. The panel begun with a presentation of the Finish perspective by *Juha Jokela* (Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki) who underlined that Finland has been one of the most pro-European member states. Although an 'anti-EU' debate has been present since the accession, until recently 'anti-EU' forces have been marginalised. He also stressed a constructive and positive membership of Finland in the EU and the fact that it has been traditionally supportive to the Community method and to an impartial European Commission. However, at some point problems related to immigration policy, which came to Finland later than in other member states, caused a distortion of the party system. Democracy, legitimacy and the crisis started to be debated along pro-anti EU lines. The current government, which does not include 'anti-European' forces does not present a clear vision of the future and is trying to postpone the debate. However, the future is to some extent discussed. The government underlines its commitment to the euro and seems to still favour the Community method and a political role of the Commission in fiscal matters. However, at the same time it also highlights the need for more intergovernmental steering in the context of economic governance. Regarding a political union, the Finish government advocates strengthening the role of national parliaments in the emerging economic system and supports a mixed, two-level scrutiny system in which they ensure this function with regard to national competences, whereas the European Parliament scrutinizes the European ones. Lisbon system should be consolidated and explained to the electorate. Jokela concluded that Fins focus on more practical aspects of the debate. Finish policy-makers realised that the EU takes significant steps towards deeper integration and that there is a need to have more debates on the future with the electorate.

*Olivier Rozenberg* (Sciences Po Paris), who presented the French perspective, argued that a traditional way of justifying the EU project in France (*'Europe puissance'*) is no longer as influential as it used to be. In the 'traditional' vision, the EU used to be perceived as a means of restoring French influence and as an independent geopolitical power. It has been an ambiguous narrative characterised by a hesitation between a 'pro-EU' and 'pro-French Europe'. Rozenberg underlined the perceived deficit of French leadership in the EU. He added that since Nice we observe the end of parity between France and Germany, what has an influence on the French views. Rozenberg then elaborated on the emergence of a new, 'soft' and manifold Euroscepticism in France. Thus, we can observe a decline of public support for France in the EU. At the same time, extreme left and right parties had some electoral successes and developed

their own discourse on Europe whereas Hollande's European discourse is not very innovative and lacks vision. On one hand, there is a claim for an economic government but on the other hand he denies the Commission's right to comment on French economic policy. Rozenberg further discussed the reasons for a difficulty to develop a new French narrative on Europe. He mentioned French elites' concept of economy and politics, which resulted in difficult acceptance of the Single Market as a common good, which brings development, the obsession of a *volonté politique*, French nostalgia for a small and integrated Europe with a double headed Franco-German *directoire* and problems to accept the fact of being 'number two'. Finally, he also pointed out a specific position of the French President and the role of the presidential election in France in shaping the narrative. He concluded that so far the rise of Euroscepticism has had no consequences over France's attitude towards EU policies. That might be explained by a governing capacity of the President and the fact that French high-level civil servants are still pro-European.

*Višnja Samardžija* (Institute for Development and International Relations) presented a perspective of a new EU member state – Croatia. She stated that the main focus of the Croatian public debate is made on the evaluation of the negotiations process in terms of achievements and lost chances rather than on a deeper debate on the question of a political union. The process of the accession negotiations lacked transparency and was not properly communicated to the citizens: there was no big enthusiasm about joining the EU. She added that Croatian society declares a low level of confidence (37%) in EU Institutions but still, this level is higher than with regard to national ones (17%). She also presented other statistics regarding the society's attitude towards the EU: 68% of citizens are of the opinion that Croatia should keep the power over a budget creation (versus 27%). Regarding the euro, only 18% think that it would bring more benefits than harm to the country (versus 50%), what can be explained by the crisis in the Eurozone. The issue of what a political union can mean for the country is therefore not much debated; however, the perception among policy-makers is that the EU should be more integrated. In this context, differentiated integration is seen as a logical and understandable outcome of current developments. *Samardžija* added that officials in the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs are reluctant to the idea of 'federation' and the concept of shared sovereignty is much more preferred. She concluded that some of the components of a political union, such as the EMU, are well accepted by Croatian policy-makers but with a focus on social dimension and territorial cohesion. The idea of a banking union is also positively received though not much debated. There is awareness that all reforms should be better communicated to the citizens and that there is a need to open the debate on the future of Europe.

In the last presentation of this panel, *Mirte van den Berge* (TEPSA, Brussels) discussed the Dutch views regarding Europe's future. She started by pointing out that although the last government was considered Eurosceptic, it was in fact rather 'anti-Islam' and 'anti-immigration'. She added that the Netherlands does not have a vision of the future but rather a 'view of pragmatic progress'. The Dutch debate is centred on division of competences and the application of principles of subsidiarity and proportionality with regard to different policies. 'More Europe' is claimed for such areas as energy, climate, the Single Market, economic governance or defence cooperation but without treaty changes. The question, how to fight democratic deficit, is also present. The Netherlands is in favour of a more direct involvement of national parliaments but at the same time also wants more powers to be given to the European Commission and to the Commission President. She further mentioned a Dutch support for setting up a budget

committee for the Eurozone members in the European Parliament and for ensuring more transparency in the preparations of the European Council summits. *Van den Berge* made a final point by saying that in the Netherlands there is not much debate on the definition of a political union, but the main focus is made on the question of EU competences and the relationship of member states with the EU.

In the following debate, *Dorota Skusevičienė* (Vilnius University) commented on the presentations and mentioned that the situation in Lithuania is somehow similar to the Finnish one in terms of Euroscepticism, which is now a bit stronger but at the same time should rather be considered as 'realism'. She also added that Lithuania lacks a clear vision of the future of the EU. Since Lithuania is currently holding a presidency in the Council, the country plays the role of a mediator instead of putting forward its vision of a political union. She also raised the question if we can speak of a discussion about visions for Europe at the European level if there is no consensus at national levels?

*William Paterson* (Aston University, Birmingham), commenting on the rise of Euroscepticism in Europe, stated that we can observe a phenomenon of an 'angry citizen'. This creates more volatility. He added that it may be reflected in the next elections to the European Parliament. *Brigid Laffan* also mentioned that the French-German couple is currently discussed in Germany in an unprecedented way.

The first day of the conference was concluded by the THESEUS Award Ceremony. The 2013 THESEUS Award for Outstanding Research on European Integration, which distinguishes persons with an outstanding academic record in the field of European Integration, went to Professor András Inotai from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest. Last year's award laureate, Professor Brigid Laffan, Director of the Robert Schuman Centre, European University Institute in Florence, delivered a laudatory speech at the remittal of the award. The junior award: THESEUS Award for Promising Research on European has been discerned to Dr Francisco Seoane Pérez from the University of Castilla-La Mancha in Cuenca for his PhD thesis 'A communications gap? A comparative study of regional engagement with EU politics in Yorkshire and Galicia'. His thesis challenges the concept of explaining the Europeans' seeming rejection of further European integration and the lower participation levels in European Parliament elections by the existence of a 'communication cap' and suggests a cultural and structural explanation that would account for the distant and apolitical nature of EU affairs.

The conference continued on 18 October with a panel 'Roadmap for a closer Union?' chaired by *Otmar Höll* from the Austrian Institute for International Affairs. The panelists were asked to discuss if more economic integration makes a political union necessary, if there is a need for a European convention and what it means for European elections in 2014.

*Stefano Braghioli* (University of Tartu) assessed the impact of the euro crisis on the legislative dynamics in the European Parliament (EP) – a topic on which he also contributed a Background Paper [available [here](#)]. He started the presentation by pointing out that even if the EP's perspective on the crisis is taken as a secondary voice, the Parliament is far from irrelevant taking into account its role in the Lisbon institutional architecture. It is the only directly elected EU institution; it reflects cleavages of European societies. He subsequently discussed to what extent and in which direction the crisis affected debates and voting in the EP. Since the debate on the crisis has been of a transnational nature, it reflects different coalitions of 'winners' and

'losers' and it also allows to study cross-cleavage phenomena according to two dimensions: political-ideology and national. Braghioli studied 33 roll-call votes on the crisis (mainly resolutions ex. on ESM, Eurobonds) held in current EP between 2009 and 2012 and compared it to previous voting dynamics in the 7<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term, distinguishing between economic-related votes and other votes. He looked at the cohesion of party groups, their alignments and alignments of national delegations and came to the conclusion that the level of cohesion within the party groups is different between the three mainstream party groups and smaller groups. According to Braghioli, the biggest party groups turned out to be more cohesive in economy-related votes (votes not directly about the crisis). With regard to votes on the crisis, their internal party cohesion decreases but the cohesion of small parties increases. In other words, when analysing votes on the crisis, we can observe a decline of grand coalitions and the increase of ideologically based coalitions including small parties. In terms of inter-delegation alignments he distinguished two macro-clusters: the 'Euro-cluster' and the 'non-Euro cluster'.

*Sabine Saurugger* (Sciences Po Grenoble) started her contribution by referring to Jean-Paul Jacqu e's presentation and raised the question if we actually need to define a political union and a vision? She remarked that a specificity of political systems is that we can think on how to adjust them incrementally and gave the example of the US constitution, which has constantly been adapted. That is why a direction is need rather than a vision. She further stressed that the EU is facing an efficiency-accountability tension. In this light, Saurugger raised the question if elites need to take into account the public opinion, and added that this is the question of democracy and the quality of representation. She then turned to the question of efficiency by indicating that this problem is about the compliance or non-compliance to the rules that a political system develops. She recalled that a debate on the democratic deficit and on how to bring the citizen closer to the decision-making has been present since the creation of the EU. Also new public management features and new governance methods have been debated. Some innovations have been introduced, for example incremental steps towards participatory democracy, strengthening of parliamentary powers and new modes of governance. She highlighted that in the past 15 years, these questions were really important but the crisis somehow blurred the importance of these issues. Accountability is the object of the crisis; new governance mechanisms have been introduced to enhance efficiency. The problem is that the rules on stability were not followed (as there were only coordination mechanisms). The problems saw under the EMU led to a number of new mechanisms, the 'Six-pack', the European Semester, the Treaty on Stability Coordination and Governance. She also stated that member states want to keep a marge of manoeuvre as the example of the Spanish government shows: Having their national plans criticised by the Commission, Spain replied that: "we are sovereign country" despite the fact that they have signed up to the European Semester. There is a question of accountability as governments have to discuss these issues with national level. Finally, she discussed the impact of the new mechanisms on accountability and efficiency. With regard to accountability, there is no new instrument, except for the inter-parliamentary conference. In some cases, constitutional courts 'defend' parliaments (for example in Germany). Concerning efficiency she emphasized the role of the Court of Justice, which is involved in the control of transposition. We can therefore observe a slow adaptation process (which we can call also 'muddling through' or incremental changes) but we cannot speak of a great change.

*Johannes Pollak* (Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna) challenged a conventional wisdom that a political union would be a salvation for the EMU. He stressed that 'more integration' is not on

the top of the agenda and if we are to call a convention, it can only work if we accept that its outcome would be a much looser integration. Pollack evoked the concept of the United States of Europe and asked what it could entail. He suggested that old literature on federalism could be taken up when politicians speak of a political union and proposed to compare the EU to the USA. He further added that there is no consensus in Europe on what a political union means. He highlighted the fact that more powers have been given to the European Parliament but still the legitimacy goes down. Regarding the role of national parliaments he stressed that strong parliaments have been strengthened whereas weak parliaments have been weakened. He added that the crisis touches the objective of integration and questioned the usefulness of the discussion on the political union. He also remarked that the crisis tainted reputation of politicians to an unprecedented degree, what is a severe sign of we are now. Finally, he concluded that Europe has become more of a problem than a solution.

The last presentation by *Funda Tekin* (Institut für Europäische Politik, Berlin) focused on differentiated integration in the context of the future of a closer union. In this context, Tekin made four points, which she developed in her presentation. She started by stressing that differentiation in the context of integration is a reality and has already proven to be a successful tool for managing heterogeneity. She added that in the context of a political union the discussion is centred on the question of the Eurozone being a natural 'core'. She also mentioned the problem of how to make differentiation inclusive and finally, she highlighted that a closer union can create outer circles of member states in the EU. Tekin further stressed that although there is no single definition of differentiation, three different types of differentiation can be observed. First of all, a case by case differentiation that gives an *ad hoc* possibility to implement different standards and does not affect the EU construction. She also distinguished a political structured cooperation, which is a tool of flexibility in the *acquis* and a predefined differentiation with conditions for participation (for example the EMU, Schengen). We can observe a differentiation in the form of intergovernmental treaties outside the treaty framework, which serve as a 'laboratory' for the EU and if they turn out to be successful they are meant to be integrated in the treaties. With regard to the crisis Tekin argued that pragmatism and time constraints fostered the idea of differentiated integration and resulted in the use of intergovernmental treaty. At the same time we cannot speak of a visionary integration. Political union may be a vision for a somehow closer union and she raised the question of how this union could look like. Most probably, there would be a natural 'core' of a closer union, a 'union within union'. Currently, we can observe deepening in the EMU but it does not mean that others do not want to have a say. In this light she raised the question of a dividing line between the Eurogroup and other member states. According to Tekin, different forms of differentiations must be of inclusive nature and they should not affect the existing construction. That is the literature has promoted the use of existing frameworks. Even if decisions do not affect all member states, others should also have influence on them. She remarked that some see opportunities in differentiated integration, but there is the question of member states accepting to be in the outer circle. She concluded that as long as we are within a single institutional framework, differentiation is not dangerous.

The panel was followed by *Valentin Kreiling* (Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, Paris) who made a presentation of his Background Paper "Building an inter-parliamentary bridge for more economic integration" [available [here](#)]. In his paper, Kreiling discusses the negotiation process between different actors on Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and



Governance (TSCG), which gave the basis to the establishment of an Inter-Parliamentary Conference for Economic and Financial Governance. He also analyses the agreement to create the conference, which was reached in 2013 at the meeting of the Speakers of EU parliaments as well as the Rules of Procedure drafted before the first conference meeting, which took place in Vilnius on 16 and 17 October 2013.

*Brigid Laffan* (European University Institute, Florence), *William Peterson* (Aston University, Birmingham), *Wolfgang Wessels* (University of Cologne) made the concluding remarks. The floor was opened by Brigid Laffan who highlighted that the EU is *de facto* a political union, if meant as a polity, as a political system. A distinction must be made between system integration and social integration as well as between constitutional democracy and popular democracy. Regarding the first distinction, there has been a profound deepening on all the dimensions of system integration (institutional change, market, policy integration). However, it brought unintended consequence, resulting in a highly integrated, interdependent system with a high level of mutual vulnerability, particularly in the euro area, where the least possible has been done. This mutual vulnerability continues, with divergences between creditors and debtors. Social integration is much weaker. There is now an important mobility in Europe, but social mobility is felt differently by different sectors of society. The issue of having winners and losers of the integration process is really serious, and must be tackled, as two different worlds with different experiences and visions of solidarity are co-existing in one Eurozone area. She also elaborated on the second distinction concerning democracy by stressing that Europe is no longer seen as the solution. Next year, a low turnout is to be expected in the European elections. Eurosceptics have been winning the debate so far as the crisis has fostered a high level of electoral volatility. In the light of Peter Mayer's concept of responsiveness vs. responsibility, a tension is growing in Europe: people do not vote because parties do not seem to bring answers, which means that currently governing parties need to develop a narrative. However, can the entire system be more responsive if the EU level tackles the issue? The system needs to be looked over as a multilevel system and more discussions on both levels are necessary. Yet it needs to go beyond a constitutional democracy, a popular democracy must be taken seriously.

The conclusions continued with remarks by *William Peterson* on differentiated integration and opting-out countries. The most important issue is to understand what problem the political union is answering. There is a problem of leadership, different models have failed: the Franco-German relationship was important when they had to compromise but this does not apply to the economic crisis. France is weakened and Germany being a principal creditor has a driving seat in the crisis management. This created an asymmetric relation in Franco-German couple. However, the German role as a hegemon is largely contested. What Germany wants is to set the rules, but it does not want to act like a hegemon. The current state is not the one of a post-crisis Union. If it was the case we would not be talking about a political union. The issue is then to move forward, both minimalist and maximalist visions of integration would require solid backup by member states. Given the unfavourable setting, the tendency to muddle through might continue.

Finally, *Wolfgang Wessels* took up the discussion on a post-crisis political vision for Europe, raising the issue of frustrations it causes in academic and political terms. He stated that each nation has a narrative for Europe, the EU constructs our ideas on Europe. He referred to Gramsci who once stated that once you lose ideas, you lose your power. Visions are part of the narrative. But is a vision needed? How much vision does a political system need? Visions from

the past have brought disappointments to the oldest generations. In terms of legitimacy gap he stated that national executives are tight by the EU level, but that was a decision of national governments to sign intergovernmental Treaties implying transfer of competences, which were ratified by national parliaments. What has been developed has not been imposed but agreed. Today, the question is not if things are imposed on states but how to apply the solutions according to the interests at stake. Still, there is a lot to do: a political union is still an open term. Euroscepticism was one of the major points of this conference and should be studied more extensively. It is important to define vision, myth, narrative – those terms were absent in the debates. A ‘crisis’ still needs to be defined, even though it has always been in the public discourse. What are the indicators to decide on what a crisis is? We have convictions that it exists but how to define it? A general attitude is that we do not know how to deal with it. He doubted that muddling through is really the way and concluded that scenarios are not enough, we should prepare thinking. It is important to look not only at what cannot be done, but what could be the way forward.