

Panel on “The Future of Europe in light of EU elections”, TEPSA Finnish Pre-Presidency Conference, 6 June 2019

TEPSA’s Finnish Pre-Presidency Conference, taking place in Helsinki shortly before the inauguration of the Finnish Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU), featured a panel discussion on “The Future of Europe in light of EU elections” organised in the framework of the Horizon-2020 project “Integrating Diversity in the European Union (InDivEU)”. The panel was attended by 71 participants.

The panel was moderated by Dr Juha Jokela (Director of the European Union Research Programme, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, and member of the TEPSA Board) and saw a keynote speech by Michel Barnier (EU Chief Negotiator, Taskforce on Article 50 negotiations with the United Kingdom), as well as interventions by Prof. Dr Michael Kaeding (TEPSA Chairperson and Professor of European Politics, University of Duisburg-Essen), Tuomas Saarenheimo (Permanent Under-Secretary, Finnish Ministry of Finance), Prof. Dr Frank Schimmelfennig (Head of European Politics Group, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology), and Dr Elisa Pascucci (Post-doctoral Researcher, University of Helsinki).



In his address titled “Brexit and the Future of the EU”, **Michel Barnier** argued that the Future of Europe is much more important than Brexit, as well as the future relationship between the EU and the UK is much more important than the divorce. Showing a sobering projection of European countries’ relative weight in the world as individual actors vs. as EU27, Mr Barnier concluded that the geopolitics of Brexit show that, “if we want to be actors and not spectators of tomorrow, we must stick together”.

Speaking about possible future relationships, Mr Barnier stressed that the best possible scenario would be the UK remaining part of the EU. The second-best scenario would be a “Norwegian regime” (with the UK being part of the internal market but not of the EU), while the third-best scenario would be a free trade agreement on the model of what the EU has with Japan or Canada. However, noted Mr Barnier, the UK has certain red lines with regard to the future economic relationship, of which the EU is taking note, and which make the free trade agreement the only possible option. The single market, reminded Mr Barnier, is not a free trade zone; it is a real ecosystem, a social, human and economic space between 28 nations, which cannot be unravelled because one country decides to leave.

Michel Barnier also touched upon the Northern Irish issue, arguing that Brexit is a lose-lose game for the parties involved and risks putting in danger the progress made over the years in the settlement of the issue.

Finally, observing that Europe represents an ageing society and a shrinking part of the world, Mr Barnier outlined the main challenges that the EU27 will face in the years to come, namely:

- The need to build a greener EU;
- The need to take our security in our own hands;
- The need to prepare for the next migration crises by developing solidarity mechanisms for those member states which are most impacted, and by developing a true partnership with Africa;
- The need to support European businesses in their quest for competitiveness;

market, Schengen area). Is it possible to identify advantages to use DI in these areas to overcome existing conflicts? In response to this question, Prof. Schimmelfennig highlighted some risks linked to the use of DI in highly integrated areas:

- There are no procedures to introduce DI in these areas;
- High cost of introducing DI in these areas, especially when it entails one of more countries leaving the said area;
- Risks of cherry picking;
- Some of these issues relate to fundamentals of the European Union (e.g. rule of law), which is not an area where the EU can differentiate without putting an end to European integration as we know it.

Therefore, concluded Prof. Schimmelfennig, the EU faces a dilemma: on the one hand given the high heterogeneity there is a high demand for DI, but looking at the individual policies we find that this would be extremely hard to implement. What the EU needs most at this moment, he added, is strengthening solidarity among member states and strengthening the institutions' capacity to face the challenges, two objectives for which DI is not the right tool.

Elisa Pascucci focused her intervention on how the migration issue was discussed during the EP election campaign and what are the implications of the migration issue for the future development of European integration. In some countries which are heavily affected by migration like Italy, the results of the European elections played in favour of right-wing populist forces, for instance with the League becoming the first party in iconic places for the migration issue (e.g. Lampedusa and Riace).

According to Pascucci "refugee crisis" is a misleading term, and we should rather be talking about a crisis of the EU asylum system. After the 2015-2016 migration peak, a system was put in place with the concept of hotspot at its centre. These centres are aimed at identifying incoming migrants and streamlining of asylum procedures. Under this system, argued Dr Pascucci, Italian and Greek



authorities are forced to identify migrants in a way that makes them responsible for these asylum applications. Complementary to the hotspot system, she reminded, is the EU-Turkey statement, with Turkey currently not accepting returns to its territory from mainland Greece.

Dr Pascucci concluded his intervention with a recommendation to completely revise or even possibly overcome the hotspot system, and to focus the EU's attention on legal ways of migration and safe passages.