

Introduction

The Ninth International scientific conference „Re-new EU – Recovery, Re-opening and Revival“, organised by the European Studies Department of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ with the kind support of Hanns Seidel Foundation and Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies took place in Sofia on 13-14 October 2022.

It is clear that Europe will have to continue to operate in the foreseeable future in a complicated environment. But the idea behind the title of the conference stays relevant. We have understood that we need Europe more than ever, that European unity as well as peace need daily care because they should not be taken for granted. I can't but quote Antynio Guterres – the Secretary General of United Nations: „Let's have no illusions. We are in rough seas. A winter of global discontent is on the horizon. A cost-of-living crisis is raging. Trust is crumbling. Our planet is burning.“

The questions and challenges facing the European Union are numerous, the answers and solutions are fewer. Never, since the Second World War, has Europe been that essential. Yet never has Europe been in so much danger. How to achieve a more united, more sovereign, more democratic Europe? Shall European union move forward only in responding to crises? How to act in order to defend EU's interests and values in these unusual times? The climate crisis is a global problem. Security risks create instability. How to make EU stronger, more autonomous and more influential?

We as researchers have a duty to seek answers and solutions because the EU should develop common solutions to common problems. We had to recall the famous phrase of Jean Monnet: „Europe will be forged in crises and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises“. But is this statement from Jean Monnet's 1976 memoirs still valid in modern conditions? Some academic research underlines the strengthening of the EU through crises, while other publications point out that the crises have a negative impact on EU unity.

This conference took place during the European Year of Youth. It is barely a coincidence that most of the authors in this volume are young researchers. The presentation of their research during the conference sparked interesting and lively discussions. Combined with the knowledge of more experienced academics, they turned the conference into a remarkable event within the activities of the Department of European Studies. The participants from Poland, Italy, Romania, India, Albania, Kosovo contributed to looking at Europe from different angles and hearing different points of view, which made the conference even more interesting. The questions asked by the students who attended the conference also enlivened the discussion. Despite the diverse topics and different points of view, presented during the conference, we all agreed that preserving the achievements of the EU as well as taking Europe forward and defending its model is an everyday responsibility.

I cannot but express my gratitude to everyone who helped to hold the conference – Hanns Seidel Foundation, Wilfried Martens Center for European Studies, the members of the organising committee, the House of Europe, the speakers, the students and all the participants in the discussions.

It will not be an exaggeration to state that the Ninth International scientific conference „Re-new EU – Recovery, Reopening and Revival“ contributed to the achievement of the permanent aim of the Department of European Studies as well as of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence to ensure the excellence of the conference debates as well as high-quality proceedings. At the same time, this conference fulfilled another goal – to attract the interest of young people to science and research in the field of European Studies.

To conclude, it is obvious that today we need imagination and dedication to follow the wise advice of Albert Einstein: „We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that we used when we created them.“

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of the Ninth International Conference
„Re-new EU – Recovery, Reopening and Revival“***