STAGNATION, TABULA RASA, VARIABLE GEOMETRY, DIFFERENTIATED SOLIDARITY: FOUR SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract:
Development of the European Union is marked by many setbacks. Various attempts at integrating the continent of Europe have failed. The European Defence Community and the European Political Community, for example, never saw the light of day, the Constitutional Treaty was rejected. Nevertheless, the EU has developed further, one might say, it has grown from failure to failure. This historical perspective is an aid in categorising current challenges.

The European Union is at the threshold of a reorganisation. Everything is pointing towards a "Europe of concentric circles" coming into being, in which there will continually be varying depths of integration – or, as the 2017 Declaration of Rome terms it: different intensity. Each Member State needs to decide for itself which circle it wishes to associate with.

Keywords*: history of EU, successes and failures in the integration process, scenarios for future development, Europe of concentric circles*

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Attractive pictures full of impressive dignity. On 25th March 1957, representatives of six European nations signed the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Treaty on the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or EURATOM). The atmosphere is solemn. What cannot be seen is that what the heads of state and government have on the table to their left is by no means the Treaty of Rome, but on the contrary, a blank piece of paper. The fact is that right up to the last moment negotiations and disagreements continued, with the result that the treaty texts could not be prepared and copied in time ready for the ceremonial signing session (Küsters, 1982), since in addition a number of technical problems had also arisen (Euractiv, 2014). The signing of the treaties was thus symbolic, the difficulties involved in so doing were symptomatic.

The history of the European Union can be recounted as a success story and taking an approach like this is also appropriate if we look back to the establishment of the European Communities in 1952 and in 1958 and compare this with the present outcome. The story can

however also be presented as a series of failures. Looking at the picture in this way helps us in putting the present challenges facing the European Union into a different perspective.

Establishing and shaping European integration is not a "soap opera", in which everyone loves everybody else and thus the ties which bind them become ever closer. Integration is the end product of far-sighted considerations, violent arguments, drastic backward steps and rotten compromises. Putting it bluntly, one might say that the EU has further developed continually from one disaster to the next. The realisation that nevertheless it has been possible to form the product of European unity in the way which we have it at the present time, and which we view to a major extent as a matter of course, ought to give us strength not to give up in despair over the present problems, which may be described broadly, although in some cases inadequately, using phrases such as refugee crisis, euro crisis, nationalist populism and Brexit, but on the contrary to get on and tackle them.

In 1945, when the war ended, politics in Europe was faced with major problems. In addition to the Herculean task of coping with tremendous human suffering created by the war and by National Socialism, and to rebuild the shattered countries, there were for Western Europe two questions being posed: 1. How can we bring it about to connect or tie in Germany in a lasting way so that there is no longer any danger emanating from it?, and 2. How can we withstand the pressure from the Soviet Union in the Cold War?

European integration as we know it today was not the first answer to these questions. Rather was it the case that in 1948, the western European countries of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom came together in the Treaty of Brussels. In this treaty the objectives are clearly defined:

> *"To afford assistance to each other, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, in maintaining international peace and security and in resisting any policy of aggression;*
> *To take such steps as may be held to be necessary in the event of a renewal by Germany of a policy of aggression"* (Treaty of Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence, 1948).

However, the Brussels Treaty did not bring about a great deal. It was transformed in 1954 into the Western European Union, WEU, and Germany became a member, too. The WEU was, until it was dissolved in 2011, the weak, military component of the European Community. Its most important function – to establish the European Defence Community EDC in 1954 in the aftermath of the failure – consisted in paving the way for Germany to join a military union and, in addition to this, up to 1973 to maintain contacts between the Member States of the European Community and the United Kingdom.

In the economic field, Western Europe also attempted to form a union which was excluding Germany, to be more precise, the western occupation zones of the former German Reich. It was intended to establish a customs and economic union between France, Italy and the BeNeLux countries, to be given the name of FRITALUX. The fact that this acronym already existed, as a designation of a washing machine (Die Zeit, 1949, p. 6), was the least of their problems. In actual fact, the French and the Italian national economies were not complementary enough to be able really to derive economic benefit from a proposal of this kind. What was missing was Germany. When the problem with the name became clear and instead there was consideration to call the planned customs union BENEFIT, it was suggested ironically that if Germany

joined it could then be called BENEFRITZ, a reference to the first name Fritz which is very common in Germany (Die Zeit, 1949, p. 6).

Nevertheless, there did already exist at this time an institution which was designed to bring (western) Europe together. Following pressure from the USA, the OEEC (Organisation for European Economic Cooperation) had been founded, with the task of coordinating the aid funding in the Marshall Plan. The United States, not itself a member of the OEEC, had been insisting that an institution such as this should be created, and in this way forced the Europeans to assume "ownership" of their mutual reconstruction process. The OEEC, which in 1961 became the OECD and by now functions as an exchange forum and think tank for developed industrial countries, did not have any major effect. The Americans, who had had an interest in Western Europe coming together, were accordingly disappointed.

> *"From 1947 to 1950 disappointment pretty much described the American reaction to what the Europeans were doing. No customs union was established (except the union between the Benelux countries – Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg – and this union was not really an American initiative). The Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), which was set up to administer the Marshall aid, became much too weak an organization"* (Lundstad, 1998, p. 30).

The Council of Europe, founded in 1949, did not succeed either in creating a profound European integration structure, because no agreement could be reached on what competences ought to be assigned to the Council. The idea originally expounded by means of a paper to bring about a European political institution with limited functions but with genuine powers, had to be speedily abandoned (Loth 2014, p. 55/1161). To the present date, the Council of Europe conventions, with the exception of the European Convention on Human Rights, are not binding for the Council's currently 47 Member States. In point of fact, not one single member country has adapted all the Council conventions, again with the exception of the European Convention on Human Rights, which, it must be granted, to use a diplomatic formulation, is certainly implemented in varying degrees of intensity (De Caluwe, 2014).

When in 1950 the negotiations to establish the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) began, Europe in a sense was already looking back on a number of failed or not sufficiently far-reaching attempts at integration. For Robert Schuman, Foreign Minister of France, who had originated an initiative to set up a common market for coal and steel, this was nevertheless no reason to become resigned, but on the contrary an incentive to work out new proposals and/or to take over the case. The design for the ECSC originated in fact from Jean Monnet, who played an important part in European politics during the 1950s (Schwabe, 2016).

The plan which Jean Monnet had elaborated envisaged amalgamating the coal and steel industries of Germany and France. Other countries were called upon to take part in this project.

Western Europe was unable after the war only to concentrate on itself. Eastern Europe had been sovietised in the period from 1945 to 1948, parliamentary democracies had no chance under the pressure from the Soviet Union. In June 1950, North Korean forces attacked South Korea, which was the beginning of the Korean War. In Korea, on one side the North Koreans, supported by China and the Soviet Union, were fighting, on the other side were the South Koreans with help from the United Nations (which at that time was dominated by the United States) and the US itself. This proxy war greatly increased the feeling of threat in Western

Europe, and the issue of strengthening Western European defence capability was high on the agenda. This could however only be thought of if west German forces were also to be included in the project – an idea which, in view of recent history, evoked major concern in western Europe.

After a long period of to-ing and fro-ing, a design for a European Defence Community (EDC) came into being, with a joint European army, the Treaty establishing the European Defence Community was signed in Paris on 27th May 1952. This EDC structure does not need to be expounded in detail at this point, since it never saw the light of day (Loth, 2014; van Middelaar, 2016).

After the French National Assembly had delayed ratification of the EDC treaty for some considerable time, on 30th August 1954 it was taken off the agenda.

Along with this European Defence Community, yet another, second, far-reaching project also failed: the European Political Community (EPC). The latter had as its objective a European government, which was to operate on the basis of a European constitution.

This European Political Community was envisaged as an overarching body for the Coal and Steel Community and for the European Defence Community, which it was intended would be merged step by step into this organisation. Since it was linked directly to EDC and was included in the Treaty for EDC, it became equally obsolete at the moment when EDC failed.

European integration was thus in the 1950s not on the road to victory, and fears increased that the entire project might fail, especially since coal was increasingly losing importance as a source of energy.

However, on the horizon there appeared a new method of producing energy, viewed completely uncritically at the time, that is, atomic energy or nuclear power. Jean Monnet, who was President of the ECSC High Authority up to 1955, saw in this source an opportunity not only to boost Europe in economic terms, but also concurrently to integrate Europe more closely, as it was to interconnect "political fusion and atomic fission", as an American friend, Max Isenbergh, wrote in a letter to him (Schwabe 2016, p. 304).

In the course of further discussion, by the middle of the 1950s two opposing concepts existed, with the aim of further developing European integration. One idea – strongly favored by Jean Monnet – of a European Atomic Union, and a concept for a European Economic Community, which was being propounded by Johan Willem Beyen, Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, and his counterparts in Belgium and Luxembourg.

There were fierce arguments about both proposals. France did not want to surrender, or to share with European partners, its right to develop its own nuclear weapons, according to Konrad Adenauer, the Federal Chancellor, in a Cabinet meeting on 5th October 1956, Germany was aiming to acquire "as quickly as possible via Euratom the opportunity to produce nuclear weapons itself" (Schwabe, 2016, p. 333). Furthermore, Germany would far rather cooperate with America and the United Kingdom, which were much further along in nuclear issues than Germany's neighbour France. It was also controversial as to what competence the European Atomic Energy Community ought to have, whether the organisation was to own all the nuclear material or whether it was only to supervise this, and to what extent it would be able to make regulations for the Member States.

Discussions taking place concurrently concerning the European Economic Community were also characterised by numerous arguments. Thus, for example, France wished for social standards to be unified, something which Germany rejected, and for the overseas territories to

be included in the treaty, which also did not meet with much sympathy in Germany. France also demanded that agriculture was to be included in the Common Market. This point was universally controversial in Germany. Ludwig Erhard, known as the "father of the German economic miracle", Economics Minister in the Adenauer cabinet, feared that the EEC would restrict Germany too much and spoke out against it.

Neither on the domestic front, nor internationally between the countries in the ECSC was there therefore massive harmony or cordial agreement. It was by no means certain that a new European Community, whether it was the Atomic Energy or the Economic Community, might be established at all. Perhaps these plans would have failed completely if the Suez crisis late in the autumn of 1956 had not brought it home to the European players that they were able to exert influence on international events only in concert.

Finally, on 25th March 1957, the Euratom Treaty and the EEC Treaty, known as the Rome treaties or the Treaty of Rome, were able to be signed. Originally, the efforts being made to unite Europe were focussed primarily on the Euratom Treaty, the European Economic Community was so to speak only the "by-catch". However, in actual fact, it is the EEC which has become the foundation for further developments in the European Communities going along to the European Union, whereas the EAEC did not play any significant part. This has also to do with the fact that the Treaty in the final moment before being signed was "de-Europeanised" by France.

> *"It [the EAEC; author's note] has utterly failed, in that amongst the six member states it did not result in integrative, as had been hoped, but on the contrary it was disintegrative impacts which were produced"* (Knipping, p. 123).

In the EEC framework, according to the Treaty, decisions were to be made unanimously, however, after ten years had passed there were to be majority decisions.

This ruling led to the next crisis in the European Communities, because in the middle of the 1960s France did not wish to transition to majority decision making. From the middle of 1965 to January 1966, this country implemented the "policy of the empty chair", that is, they did not attend the meetings and in this way stalemated any decisions by the Community.

This then led to the "Luxembourg Compromise": the European Community states would in future decide by a majority, unless "very important interests of one or more of the partners" were to be at stake, in which case efforts would be made to achieve a solution by mutual agreement. The text continued as follows:

> *"The six delegations note that, in the question as to what is to be done if efforts to reach joint understanding do not lead entirely to the goal, there continue to be differences of opinion"* (EEC Council of Ministers, 1966).

As a summary, it may be said that this retrospective view of the Treaty of Rome which was agreed on 60 years ago, and of the preceding events, indicates that the process of European unification has always been accompanied by conflicts, backwards steps and lack of success. Further points along the way could be listed and expanded, but these would not make any difference to the overall picture: in 1972, the Norwegian people in a referendum rejected accession to the European Community which their government had already negotiated (they did the same again in 1994), in the second half of the 1970s, the EEC was stagnating to such an extent that people were generally referring to "euro sclerosis", the Swiss in 1992 refused ratification of the treaty on the European Economic Area (EEA), which meant that thus

application for membership which the country had put forward was put on (permanent) ice, in 1985 Greenland, to a large extent an autonomous part of Denmark, declared its withdrawal from the European Communities, and in 2015 the Icelandic people officially withdrew their application for membership, after having already broken off negotiations two years beforehand.

The Treaty of Maastricht, in terms of which in 1991 the European Currency Union was established, was met in Denmark with no acceptance, with the result that the treaty could only come into force after undergoing revision. Denmark and the United Kingdom secured for themselves an "opt-out", that is, a guarantee that they do not need to join in with this project for the euro common currency, which was intended to bring Europe together. Admittedly, Sweden was, in common with all the other EU Member States, obliged to concur, something which however did not prevent the country, following on from a public vote which had a negative decision for the euro, from ignoring this commitment.

The Treaty of Nice, which the European Community passed at the end of 2000 and which could only come into force at a later stage, because ratification in Ireland when it first went to a referendum was rejected, was so bad that a conference to revise the Treaty had already been summoned before the Treaty came into force. The result of this, the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, was torpedoed in 2004 by referenda held in France and the Netherlands. Following a period of reflection, which might also be described as being paralysed from shock, the European Union passed the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 – which again was rejected by the Irish people in a referendum and could only enter into force in a second run-through.

Thus, people who are now despairing in view of current crises, because they believe that now, after sixty years of conflict-free development, the EU is suddenly facing numerous problems, have got it wrong. Naturally, adopting a historical perspective does not mean that current challenges will disappear, but it can transmit strength and equanimity enabling us to face them.

Internal problems faced with challenges which the EU needs to deal with at the present time can be subsumed under a common heading: there is at the moment between Member States and their respective societies no longer any consensus about what we want to achieve through European integration and how much sovereignty we are prepared to transfer to the European level for this purpose. One thing is quite clear in this context: exercising sovereignty jointly at European level has advantages for everyone, nevertheless, these must be paid for through restrictions, compromises and thus disadvantages at national level, too.

Discussions about how to deal with immigration to the EU, particularly by refugees, have made it clear that it is probably impossible for all 27 remaining EU Member States to be able to agree on a common denominator. What was new in the arguments on accepting refugees in various EU countries was not that there was disagreement about it, but on the contrary, the fact that the entire proposal – including decisions taken together, but accepted by majority vote, not unanimously – to disperse 160,000 persons seeking shelter, who were already on EU territory, amongst the Member States (Council of the European Union, 2015 a), was rejected out of hand by several Member States (Council of the European Union, 2015 b). What would have been "normal" for the EU is to haggle over numbers and payments and in the end to arrive at a compromise which everyone can live with. Slovakia and Hungary have taken the decision to the European Court of Justice, but are refusing to implement the decision until a judgement has been pronounced.

The Bratislava summit meeting in September 2016, at which the EU wanted to lick its wounds over the Brexit result and to map out the future, also did not produce anything but formulaic compromise statements.

> *"The EU is not perfect but it is the best instrument we have for addressing the new challenges we are facing. We need the EU not only to guarantee peace and democracy but also the security of our people. We need the EU to serve better their needs and wishes to live, study, work, move and prosper freely across our continent and benefit from the rich European cultural heritage"* (European Council, 2016).

However, politically correct poetry about European unity is no longer enough to overcome entrenched positions. This became evident in the closing declaration by the (once again 27) heads of state and government on the occasion of the commemorative meeting on 25th March 2017, marking the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome. It also conjures up the unity of the EU, but it describes this in the following words:

> *"We will make the European Union stronger and more resilient, through even greater unity and solidarity amongst us and the respect of common rules. Unity is both a necessity and our free choice. Taken individually, we would be side-lined by global dynamics. Standing together is our best chance to influence them, and to defend our common interests and values. We will act together, at different paces and intensity where necessary, while moving in the same direction, as we have done in the past, in line with the Treaties and keeping the door open to those who want to join later. Our Union is undivided and indivisible"* (European Council, 2017).

The central message is to be found in the parenthesis: at different paces and intensity, where here the "different intensity" is what is really new. A Europe of varying speeds ("different paces") has always existed. The phrase means that everyone is working towards the same goal, but they will be moving to reach it at differing speeds. One example is the agreement about the euro, which – with the exception of the United Kingdom and Denmark – all the EU Member States are to adopt, but which only 19 of them are using as their currency, or also the Schengen regulations, which – once again with an opt-out for the United Kingdom and for Ireland – are intended to apply to everyone, but for a variety of reasons are not yet in force in Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Cyprus.

However, it is also evident from the mentioned examples, the euro and Schengen, that there is also a Europe of varying intensity already, because several countries are consistently and continually failing to observe commitments laid down in the relevant treaties. However, what is new is the fact that this is now, in the Rome declaration, no longer seen as an exception or minor operational slip, but on the contrary as an instrument for future development of the European Union. This should occur without the treaty being amended. The EU Treaty foresees in Article 20 of TEU a possibility of increased cooperation and describes the purpose:

> *"Enhanced cooperation shall aim to further the objectives of the Union, protect its interests and reinforce its integration process. Such cooperation shall be open at any time to all Member States, in accordance with Article 328 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union."* (TEU, 2009, Article 20).

Enhanced cooperation is tied to various conditions which have amongst other things led to this instrument being to date used only in two instances: in establishing a European

patent and in the case of a regulation about which divorce laws should apply in bi-national marriages. The real statement in the phrase in the Rome declaration about different paces and intensity is however a warning to states which might block actions against their hoping that protracted treaty negotiations might lie ahead, during which they would in every case be able to register a veto.

That is to say, if the EU Treaty does not lend itself to closer cooperation, this can also be created beyond the Treaty. The Stability Treaty (Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union, 2013) which came into force in 2013 and upon which 25 EU Member States agreed outside the limits of European law, may serve as a model in this case.

The Rome declaration made it obvious to all those who incant unity and togetherness that something in the European Union must and will change. In good time before the meeting, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, presented a White Paper depicting five development options (European Commission, 2017).

These future scenarios are:

1. Carrying on
2. Nothing but the Single Market
3. Those who want more do more
4. Doing less more efficiently
5. Doing much more together

In the foreword to the White Paper, the Commission President declares that "Rome", that is, the summit meeting of the EU-27 heads of state and government in March 2017, needs to "be the start of a new chapter". Thus, it is clear that the first scenario is not really meant to be taken seriously. There is no "carrying on", and if this was not the case, there would be no need for all this discussion about the scenarios. The message in the White Paper is rather: something needs to change. Continuing the status quo would in fact lead to progressive paralysation in the EU, and thus also to yet further loss of acceptance in EU public opinion and in third countries as well. The EU has indeed been attempting this "carrying on" for many years, it has been trying to find rules for exceptions, special conditions and compromise formulations, in order just to get by. This tactic has reached its end, this is indeed the basis for the entire debate which should have been conducted long ago, but which has now only just begun.

A second possibility, which Juncker does not even put forward, would be to wind up the European Union. Since the United Kingdom has expressed a wish to leave the EU, since the public declarations by the candidate for the French Presidency, Marine Le Pen, who intended to take her country firstly out of the euro and then out of the EU (and won over 11 mio votes in the election), since the growth of nationalist and populist movements in many Member States, this consideration is not unthinkable any more. If evidently the EU has achieved its major objective after all, that is to say, of ensuring peace amongst the Member States, why should we then go on with it? Economic progress could equally well be achieved through a free trade zone. With EFTA there is even a model for this already available, we would only have to take it over. There would not be any directives from "Brussels" any more, no compromises, no taking into account of others, no common currency which makes national devaluations impossible, no directives about particulates, no drinking water directive. For so many people this prospect seems tempting, but it would be renouncing the future. In the White Paper the European Commission points out justifiably that Europe is losing importance

by comparison with other regions of the world and that this process is also not to be avoided[1]. The only chance of exerting any influence on global events, which also decisively determine our conditions of life, is to do this together. To express this rather pointedly: any country which leaves the EU, so that it will not be directed from Brussels, where we all have a say, will then receive its public announcements directly from Beijing, where we in Europe have no voice. "Tabula rasa" is an illusion of an urban conglomeration resident suffering stress, who dreams of living quite alone on a remote island. In the event that his dreams were realised, the dream would rapidly turn into a nightmare.

Thus, the EU needs to be progressed and further developed, but not in the way we have been doing so far. Once again the EU will be compelled, to transform the lack of success which is glaringly obvious in the present situation into success.

Since however it is evident that in the 27 Member States there are not only differing but also irreconcilable ideas, this is only going to be possible by means of differentiation. In this context two models are in existence: variable geometry and differentiated integration on the basis of reciprocal solidarity.

Variable geometry, that is, "Europe à la carte" has at first glance numerous advantages. It functions according to the following principle: each country joins in on those occasions when the country is interested. In this way there are for various policy areas different constellations. Conceivably there would be an EU of 22 states for freedom of movement, an EU of 17 for environmental protection, an EU of 12 for social policies and so on. After all, there is an EU of 19 for a common currency already. Those participating in the various sub-unions would in some cases be identical, in some cases they would be different. In the field of security and defence we already have this, too. Not all the EU Member States are members of NATO and vice-versa. The necessity to "swallow the bitter pill", that is, to accept regulations which do not correspond to the interests of a country or which meet with strong domestic resistance, vanishes or at least pales away. Acceptance for the European Union – or the European Unions? – might in this way be raised among the populations of Member States. A model could be the Visegrád group of countries, in which Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have joined together[2]. Where the four countries have mutual interests – such as currently in blocking an EU refugee policy, they act together. Where they have no congruence of interests, they do not make an effort to find a compromise, on the contrary, they simply choose not to act in common. The Union for the Mediterranean, a union initiated by France in 2008, between the EU and the countries bordering on the Mediterranean, is organised according to this plan[3]. The idea in doing so was to achieve progress in the southern Mediterranean region by means of variable geometry. There were to be a variety of projects to be realised and anyone who did not want to join in for something could simply let it go. It must be admitted that the success balance sheet of the Union for the Mediterranean, which after all will mark its tenth anniversary in 2018, is, not to put too fine a point on it, limited. Even with the help of variable geometry it has not been possible to achieve advances worthy of mention. The

[1] "Der erfolgreiche Abstieg Europas" ("The successful decline of Europe") is the title of a book by the German political scientist Eberhard Sandschneider published as long ago as 2011, discussing precisely these issues (Sandschneider 2011).

[2] An overview can be found on the Visegrád group website: http://www.visegradgroup.eu; last accessed: 1st May 2017.

[3] An overview is given on the web site of the Union for the Mediterranean: http://ufmsecretariat.org; last accessed: 1st May 2017; cf. also Schwarzer/Werenfels, 2008.

Visegrád group on the other hand is a pressure group within the EU. (It originally arose as an association jointly to bring forward their EU membership.) This group does not need to structure every single policy field in a supranational way, after all, the EU is doing this. The Visegrád Four only needs to join together in exerting pressure in places where their interests are in alignment, and thus they can reinforce them.

Notwithstanding its great charm at first glance, variable geometry has as a concept two serious disadvantages. In the first place, if it is being thought of as an organisational principle for the EU, it complicates EU structures extremely. Apart from technical problems which a process of this kind would entail in particular for smaller Member States with more modest administrative capacity, there are no longer any recognisable European legitimation structures. Legitimation would rather be rebounded totally to the national level, since variable geometry is of necessity intergovernmental.

The European Union would then turn into a second Council of Europe, in which resolutions are passed with which countries may comply, but are not obliged to. The Council of Europe is a very honourable institution, but it is not a powerhouse.

The strength of the EU up to now was in the fact that it was able – and has done so – to compensate for disadvantages in one sphere by means of advantages in some other field. Often this kind of "package dealing" is discredited as horse trading, because matters are associated with one another which in actual fact do not belong together at all. However, as a result this leads to compromises which everyone is able to accept, because the disadvantage which they endure in one sphere can be compensated for by an advantage in another aspect. So, (to take a random example) EU structural funds to extend a Lisbon airport may be linked with subsidising Italian olive oil, with relaxing climate protection regulations for larger German cars and locating a new EU organisation in Estonia. The more "bargaining chips" there are on the table, the easier it becomes to find solutions which everyone is able to agree with. If now policy areas and players in them are to be separated from one another and every policy is to be managed in a monothematic context, this type of compensation and balancing of interests becomes much more difficult. Of necessity, countries would in every situation have to agree on the lowest common denominator. Variable geometry is therefore by no means a model for the future.

A "Europe à la carte", where a country participated now in this case and another country would rather join in somewhere else, will not be forthcoming, but on the contrary, there will be various circles of graduated solidarity. This means the idea of differentiated integration is now under the microscope. Discussion about a Europe of varying circles is not new, it was already being debated in the 1990s in terms of a "core (or inner)" Europe. In 1994, two CDU politicians, Wolfgang Schäuble and Karl Lamers, produced a paper on this topic, which they made public. The introduction sounds appallingly up to date:

> *"The process of European unification has reached a critical point in its development. If it is not possible to find a solution to the reasons for this dangerous development in the next two to four years, then the European Union will develop, contrary to the objective depicted in the Maastricht Treaty of a Europe growing ever closer together inevitably into a loose formation, basically restricted to a number of economic aspects with various sub-groupings. Using an 'enhanced' free trade zone like this would not enable the existential problems in European societies and the external challenges they face to be overcome"* (Schäuble/Lamers, 1994).

Several years later, Joschka Fischer, at that time the German Foreign Minister, took up the debate again. In an address at the Humboldt University of Berlin in the year 2000, after it had become evident that the Treaty of Amsterdam had not fulfilled those expectations that had been placed in it, as a "Maastricht II", of creating a political European Union, and prior to the major accession development, which then took place in 2004, called for further EU development to take place in two or three stages:

> *"First of all, with extending increased cooperation between those member states which wish to cooperate more closely than others, as is already the case in the economic and monetary union and with Schengen. In several areas we can make progress with this idea: in further development of the euro 11 zone to form an economic and political union, in environmental protection, in combating crime, in developing a joint immigration and asylum policy and of course also in foreign affairs and security policy"* (Fischer, 2000).

The second stage was intended then to be the formation of a "centre of gravity", in other words of a "core" Europe, into which perhaps in a third step the other EU Member States might follow. In France as well, similar ideas were being propounded. The former President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, spoke out in favour of a federation of a number of nation states as a sort of union in the European Union, the President of France Jacques Chirac spoke in favour of an "avant-garde" (Busse, 2000).

All these considerations were discussed and then faded away again. There was hope that the European train could be driven on further without the need to uncouple any of the carriages. However, in the meantime it has become apparent that the 27 passengers in this train want to travel for a variety of distances and in different directions as well. It will therefore be necessary to move closer to the idea of a "core" Europe. This is also reflected in the 25th March 2017 Declaration of Rome from which a quotation was given previously that not only refers to different speeds, but also to different intensity.

Frequently, both these concepts, a Europe of different speeds and a Europe of different degrees of intensity – are treated as the same. However, in actual fact, they are fundamentally different. A "Europe of different speeds" means that we are all striving for the same goal, merely that we will reach it more or less quickly. A Europe of varying intensity means, however, that there are for a considerable period of time – not necessarily for ever – circles of different depths of integration. This Europe of concentric circles is ultimately a "core" Europe – with one or more circles surrounding it. This is also Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's idea. Admittedly, he only intends to make a statement on his various scenarios in the autumn 2017, but in point of fact, he had already sketched out his line of thought immediately prior to the White Paper being issued. In an address given on 23rd February 2017 at the Catholic University of Louvain he said:

> *"We can do many more things together, but it is no longer possible to think that we can all do the same thing together"* (Juncker, 2017).

In the rest of his talk he then refers to a "construction plus structure", that is, a more firmly structured inner circle, these words, which is intended to be open to all.

This "coalition of the willing", to which Angela Merkel frequently referred in connection with a solution to the refugee question (FAZ 2016), is intended to make European integration attractive again. The "willing" can arrive at solutions and, since they wish to cooperate

across the whole range of policy, can also produce results. This then makes the European supranational association again attractive also for others.

Naturally, in this context there are numerous questions arising as to how a core Europe such as this might be arranged from the institutional point of view. Would it have at its disposal its own Parliament (as the then German Federal Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer had already proposed in his address in 2000), its own Commission? These issues are not easy to answer, but just continuing to let everything carry on as it has done up to now, because we are apprehensive about spelling out new ideas, will not get us any further. How many countries will finally be in this "core" Europe is of secondary importance. What is really important is that those countries which do come together in the core are reliable, that they do want to achieve common goals together. Scarcely has this idea been mentioned when speculations start up about who might belong to an inner circle like this and who could determine this. The answers can be easily given. Those who wish to belong will belong. It is not the size of the country, its economic strength or its geographical position, which will determine participation, but on the contrary, exclusively the willingness to be integrated jointly with the other partners and to take on the commitments that arise from this. This is also the foundation for solidarity. Solidarity is not welfare, no, indeed, it is a compact: each entity will fulfil its obligations and on this basis we will all stand up for one another.

Of course, a construction such as the described one will also have an impact on the financial means that will be available. Since we cannot assume that the EU Member States will sizeably increase their contributions to the European Union, the funds will need to be distributed differently. In so doing it will turn out that those countries which are doing more together will apply more financial means for this as well, with the result that there is less money left over for the Member States in the outer circle. Presumably, this is also what the Visegrád countries are afraid of, when in a statement they evoke unity in the European Union, a unity which they have after all no less than torpedoed over the refugee question, they accept enhanced cooperation, as has been intended in the treaties, and then come to this conclusion:

"In order to safeguard economic convergence and social security we should make the most of the already existing instruments and principles. The EU budget should continue to provide long-term, predictable and stable investment. Research and innovation, infrastructure and education policies are also key. The role of the cohesion policy in this regard is irreplaceable" (Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries, 2017).

This hope that everything in the EU will remain as it was, except that politically unpleasant questions, such as the immigration crisis, will be solved by one or more countries on their own, for which they generously concede "enhanced cooperation" as in the EU treaties, will not be able to withstand reality. The "different degrees of intensity" referred to in the Rome declaration will also involve varyingly intensive political influence and varyingly intensive access to joint financial means. To this extent, in the near future, inhabitants and governments of all 27 EU Member States will need to discuss and to decide which is the circle of integration in which they want to take their place. By means of the European Commission the White Paper and the Declaration by the 27 heads of state and government issued in Rome, this discussion has been brought out from the narrow circles of experts openly into the wide public domain.

In a retrospective view dating from 2025, it could well be that the present crisis in the EU will have proved to be one of those successful failures, too, in which the EU has been able to constitute itself anew. Less Member States, which do more, will bring about more

than more Member States which achieve very little or nothing at all. In this sense, it is by no means a certain judgement that the "new" EU will as a result be weaker than what we have at the moment. For the European Union there is beginning now perhaps the most engaging decade in its history – members of the public in Europe need in this context to be the players, not spectators.

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