UTE SCHEUB

The Unfinished EUROPE Democracy

A Vision for the European Union

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PUBLISHED BY MEHR DEMOKRATIE E. V.

The European house

Is the fate of the European Union something that is close to your heart? Are you worried about the danger that it might disintegrate at any moment now? About the growth of nationalism and right-wing populism? Then you've come to the right place. The elections to the European Parliament in May 2019 represent a dramatic and fateful choice: they may determine whether the Union survives at all.

Donald Trump's former chief strategist Steve Bannon has announced that he intends – through campaigns by his foundation, The Movement – to increase the number of right-wing populists and right-wing radicals sitting in the EU Parliament from the current 14.4 percent to around 30 percent, and then to destroy the EU from within. Bannon has already met with Viktor Orbán, Nigel Farage, Alice Weidel, Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini on several occasions, and has also appeared in front of their supporters. Salvini is now considering taking the fight to the enemy by standing for election as the head of the EU Commission and, together with Le Pen, rages against "the true enemies of Europe" in Brussels.[1] Bannon, former vice president of the scandal-hit firm *Cambridge Analytica* and executive chair of the media portal *Breitbart News*, knows exactly how to rig elections – with the financial help of neoliberal billionaires like Robert Mercer. *Cambridge Analytica* is strongly suspected of manipulating Trump's election and the Brexit vote via "dark posts" on Facebook and social bots. He also played a possibly crucial role in the WhatsApp-led, extremely dirty election campaign of the new fascist president Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.[2] Bannon should be very proud: no fewer than three globally important votes have gone his way. Next up on his programme of destruction is the EU.

The EU is in the deepest crisis it has faced since its foundation. The United Kingdom will soon leave; right-wing governments of member states are refusing to implement joint decisions; mutual distrust is

eating into its bones. For the first time ever, the possibility of collapse is in the air. Europe is much more fragile than we thought. Reform and democratisation of the EU institutions seems more urgent than ever, especially since those with responsibility often seem to be acting irresponsibly, or cluelessly. Their lack of political imagination is palpable.

The EU summit of the national heads of government in July 2018 enabled us to see the disaster playing out under a magnifying glass. It was a morality play about how national politicians afflicted by St. Vitus's dance – in this case, the German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer – could paralyse the entire Union. The search for solutions to the most urgent problems – banking crisis, social crisis, euro crisis, climate crisis, democracy crisis – was put on hold. On account of Seehofer's desire for a power politics wrestling match with Angela Merkel, the heads of government, at the insistence of the German Chancellor, had to focus almost exclusively on the situation at their national borders. Despite declining numbers of refugees, they agreed to further tighten asylum laws, including introducing "regional disembarkation platforms" in countries known to practise torture, such as Libya – which makes a mockery of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Pope accused the Union of "shocking egoism".[3] If Seehofer had succeeded in getting his way at the Bavarian-Austrian border, this in itself would have affected only a handful of asylum seekers; but it would have set off a domino effect at other borders, thereby possibly bringing the entire EU to the brink of collapse.

All the crises listed above are about borders, boundaries, or limits. About limitless political egos, about the borders and/or limits of the EU, of its member states, and of its capacity to act. And about underlying questions. Should integration go further? Should the EU become a federal state, or should it remain a confederation of states? How should it handle borderless free trade, borderless and limitless data streams, and the runaway fear that afflicts so many people in the face of this boundless modernity? How should the EU deal with those who want to protect themselves against this fear with so many new walls and fences that nothing would remain of European integration? How should it counter the gigantic, looming shadow of the threatening,

border-hopping refugee, who supposedly calls into question all borders and values?

The worst thing is that those in charge in Brussels and the European capitals no longer even ask themselves such questions. In the summer of 2018, the European public witnessed an EU summit of cluelessness. Hardly anyone – apart from the French President Emmanuel Macron – still dares to put forward a vision. Oh, for the days when even arch conservatives would enthuse breathlessly, as Franz Josef Strauss did in 1984, that "Europe is our future!"[4] But the deepening, now almost bottomless abyss of distrust between the EU and the public cannot be resolved by ever-further tightening of the asylum regulations. Evelyn Roll, editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, outlines what would be required as follows. "Right-wing populism is enforcing a switch from what was in effect rule by the elites to citizen participation. Citizens are the ones who can get things done. In fact, in the beginning it was their job, their responsibility. That was the whole point of democracy." She even found a pithy slogan for it: "We are Europe!"[5]

Events sometimes develop a frightening momentum of their own, as we know from the fall of the Berlin Wall. Gradual processes of decay can lead to a dizzyingly sudden collapse of our accustomed and ordinary present. It could happen to the EU, if right-wing populist leaders achieve a widespread breakthrough. They whip up an imaginary homogenous "people" against a "corrupt elite", and after a victory they present themselves as the "embodiment of the will of the people" as they threaten and bully the media, the judiciary and the opposition. The sociologist Oliver Nachtwey calls this "de-civilisation" – when "the mortar really begins to crumble".[6]

This makes it all the more important to come up with a visionary plan for Europe, in order to defend it – and to do so from the bottom up, from the citizens. We should be prepared for Zero Hour. We need to think of new ideas for the reconstruction of the European house, and we need to mix up some more mortar. The run-up to the elections to the EU Parliament offer us an opportunity. We need a pan-European

movement that flows across borders just as easily as the streams of European capital do.

Because we have a lot to lose – a tremendous amount. People who have not experienced the horrors of war often do not realise this. "Europe's young people take many things for granted," writes Jens Baumanns, a 24-year-old student. "We don't know any different – elections, democracy, peace, stability, in short, Europe's fundamental values, things of which the rest of the world can only dream. Now these values are under attack. Now we have to learn to fight for them."[7] European union was the answer to the Second World War. It brought us decades of peace and prosperity. And we're supposed to put all that at risk? Was everything really better in the pure, unsullied nation states of yore? Was it much more fun to wait in traffic jams for hours at European borders? Would it somehow be an uplifting experience to exchange currencies again? Would it be homely to renounce our freedom to travel and to move to other countries? How could little countries like Germany, France or Hungary still hold their own in a future in which Europe's economic strength is shrinking compared with China or India? The former Belgian Prime Minister Paul-Henri Spaak once observed that "there are only two types of states in Europe: small states, and small states that haven't yet realised that they are small".

The shared European house

What do you think of when you hear the term "European house", or "European home"? A ruined shack? A bureaucrats' skyscraper of mirrored glass? An impregnable fortress surrounded by barbed wire, CCTV cameras and security guards? Or a freeform modular open building, with lots of cosy apartments for the diverse community living there and their different needs?

The European house is a metaphor frequently used by politicians and journalists for the EU or for Europe as a whole. It goes back to Mikhail Gorbachev, the former Soviet head of state and party. In the final declaration after his meeting with the then Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl before the fall of the Berlin Wall in June 1989, it was stated that

the particular goal of both states was the "construction of a common European house". (Gorbachev's original metaphor was variously translated as "common European house", "common European home" or "all-European house".)

Of course, he didn't mean the EU administrative buildings in Brussels, which had long existed already. They stick out of the bourgeois architecture of the Belgian capital like a sore thumb: here, the patrician apartment blocks of the old city, with their ornate facades; there, the European Quarter – all glass, no frills, the huge buildings loom upwards to the sky, sober to their very core; pure functionality, without creature comforts of any kind; the essence of administration. The only splash of colour comes from the blue Euro flags with their 12 golden stars.

Yet the European Quarter is a place where history has been written. Here, a shared house is being built for the peoples of the continent, who, following centuries of war, are now living together peacefully. A historically unique place, therefore, that has overcome aggressive nationalism, and might perhaps have deserved more colour, perfumed breezes and passion. This is the first transnational governmental institution in the world without its own territory. According to the late German sociologist Ulrich Beck, the EU is a "negotiated state".[8] The Union is a pioneer, says the Austrian writer Robert Menasse. "What is currently developing in Europe, accompanied by all the crisis symptoms that such a world-historical process produces, is something completely new".[9] "The rest of the world will hopefully learn from the European example," writes the bestselling Israeli author Yuval Noah Harari.[10] And the French philosopher Bruno Latour even compares the EU "with its multifaceted, intermeshing rules" to an ecosystem. "It is precisely this kind of experience that is needed if we want to get to grips with climate change, which recognises no borders."[11]

From a distance, perhaps non-Europeans see the advantages of the EU even more clearly. "Nowhere else in the world," wrote the leftist British-American historian Tony Judt in 2010, "has such a vast region been so successfully built up and managed without war or empire

formation."[12] Barack Obama, certainly no leftist, wrote in 2016 that "it's easy for a non-European to remind Europeans how great what they have created is … With more than 500 million people and at least 24 languages, Europe is one of the greatest political achievements of modern times".[13]

In 2004, US author Jeremy Rifkin compared Europe with the USA. He wrote a rapturous hymn to the EU with its "polycentric style of government" and its "multilevel governance". Europe, he went on, has a great future ahead of it. European societies are more oriented towards the common good than individualistic US-Americans. Europeans, he claimed, find their freedom in relationships and quality of life, not in autonomy.[14] At the core of the American dream lies individual success ("from dishwasher to millionaire"); at the core of the European dream is community.

Some readers may now be asking, "I beg your pardon, but where did Rifkin experience that? Is he hallucinating after spending too much time sunbathing in Italy?" But people who travel to Europe from the USA can probably see the differences much more clearly than people who grow up here. The sociologist Oskar Negt is also a firm advocate of rescuing the unique social elements that characterise Europe.[15] And this should help us to see what it is we have to lose. And why US President Donald Trump declares the EU to be an "enemy", and why he wants – together with Putin and other autocrats – to destroy it: because, despite all the wrongs and hideous injustices in Europe, things are much better and fairer here than they are in the USA. Or in Russia, China, and many other countries.

Of course, the EU can also be seen in a completely different light. As a bureaucratic monster. As an artificial, self-contained bubble. As an empire run by pompous Eurocrats who prescribe the permitted degree of curvature for cucumbers, and prevent countries from governing themselves. As the neoliberal government of business, making the rich ever richer and the poor ever poorer. And so on. Yet even the most critical views cannot deny the fact that the EU is something historically unprecedented.

But it is also true that Europe is unfinished. That term applies above all to its democracy, i.e. the capacity for self-determination of its supreme sovereign – its roughly 510 million people. But what would happen if its citizens were involved in the construction of their shared house? If they could discuss and draft the architectural blueprints together? The buildings would surely be completely different. More open; more varied; more citizen-friendly; more inviting, for all who live on this young – and at the same time old – continent. Alongside the necessary administrative skyscrapers there would probably be open spaces, public works of art, and little niches in which the best of European traditions would be celebrated, inspired by the most beautiful architectural styles. For example, a Greek agora with space for citizens' assemblies and the democratic exercise of the art of debate. Freely accessible libraries, landscapes of culture and knowledge where edifying and illuminating thinking is encouraged. Restaurants celebrating the wonderful diversity of European cuisine. Coffee houses, as informal meeting places where the noble traditions of gossip and idle chatter are cultivated. Spacious market halls filled with the scents of foods of all kinds: Italian pasta, German bread, Romanian tomatoes, Belgian chocolates, French wines and much, much more.

We want to have a say in government

The most important thing is perhaps the agora, the public meeting and discussion place of the city states of Ancient Greece. People have a deep-seated need for self-determination and a say in how they are governed. Their voice is their key social instrument. The Latin term "res publica" gave us our modern "republic". In all public (or "republican") affairs, we reach agreement on our common goals through language and voice. What's more, it is how we first establish republican community. And it is how we create wider resonance – literally, re-sounding.

The essence of democracy is polyphony, in contrast to the enforced mono-phone and mono-tone aural environment of dictatorship. It consists of raising one's own voice and finding concordance, or harmony, with others. This is a joyful experience in which mouth, heart and lungs, feelings, spirit and soul are all involved. We speak for

ourselves. We experience ourselves as living individuals. As vocal and effective. Our voices go back and forth; they may be dissonant, or create strange tones, but afterwards they often come back together to form a new main chord, a consensus – a concordance. Not only in choirs, but in discussions, too, it is clear that there is a fundamental human ability to tune into one another, and a need for resonance. And this in turn is the basis for mutual understanding. We need democratic polyphony like we need the air we breathe. Voices sound when we listen to each other and look at each other. Hence our deep need to be seen (re-spected, held in regard) and to be heard (to be listened to).

Only when this is not fulfilled, because the rulers do not listen to the voices of the ruled, when they do not enjoy re-spect, only then does dissatisfaction arise – and frustration, anger, annoyance, resentment, burning hatred of "those at the top who don't listen, to whom we don't matter". In short: the hatred that fuels right-wing populism. Its leaders and their resentful trolls demand revenge for all those who feel unheard, unseen, ignored.

Representative democracy does not completely fulfil the fundamental human yearning to be seen and heard, the yearning for respect and resonance. This is because it involves delegating our voice to those whom we elect. We literally give them our voice, our vote (from a Latin word meaning a promise or a vow) at the ballot box. Consequently, many of our representatives are only interested in us shortly before they come up for re-election – every 4 or 5 years. Democracy is thus dangerously reduced to purely electoral democracy. In Ancient Greece, the European birthplace of democracy, it was practised as direct democracy, in the form of assemblies and sortition (appointment to office by lottery). Anyone wanting to resolve the democracy crisis, in the EU or elsewhere, should therefore demand and promote the idea that its representative forms need to be supplemented by direct and consultative democracy.

"Consultative citizens" councils, set up to advise politicians, often find better, more convincing, more inclusive solutions to political problems. Randomly selected bodies of this kind have been used – in

Canada, the Netherlands, Iceland and Ireland – to discuss proposed new election laws and constitutional reforms. In Iceland, the world's first "citizens' constitution" was created on the basis of a collective citizens' consultation, though it ultimately foundered on the conservative forces in their parliament. In Ireland, a citizens' council helped pave the way for the success of the direct democratic referendum on the introduction of same-sex marriage.[16]

A decisive factor for the quality of citizens' councils is that demographic criteria such as gender, age, ethnic background, occupation and educational level are taken into account in the lottery procedure (this is known as "qualified random selection"). If the first selection stage produces predominantly old, white, Christian men, or predominantly young, dark-skinned, Muslim women, then the draw continues until the selection is broadly representative. The biggest advantage of citizens' councils is that they give lobbyists virtually no opportunity for influence, on account of the selection being random. Additionally, those selected are not pursuing their own interests. A great variety of voices can be heard, and a variety of interests and wishes expressed and taken into account. Because – in the aggregate – women tend to have different needs from men, young people different from old, homosexuals different from heterosexuals and so on.

Our threatened democracy in the EU can only be saved by defending it from the front. By expanding, broadening, deepening its legitimacy, through the inclusion of all members of society. By making all voices audible. Through direct democracy as in referendums, through consultative democracy as in citizens' councils, from the smallest village up to the EU bodies. And all of this always on the common foundation of values, and under the common roof, of the European house.

This book is published by
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We need a new positive vision for Europe. Up until now our European house has been more like an impregnable fortress of bureaucracy than a flexible and open building that welcomes and shelters all kinds of different people with their different needs. This book describes how the European house can be totally renovated, brick by brick. Its foundations will consist of a broader democracy, civic participation, solidarity, human rights and climate protection.