

## Towards the Commission's Conceptions of the EU's Future

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### Abstract

The article is a reaction to the European Commission's White Paper on the EU's future released on 1 March 2017. It presents and reviews the fundamental scenarios of next evolution of the Union involved in the Paper. The following five scenarios – “Carrying on”, “Nothing but the single market”, “Those who want more do more”, “Doing less more efficiently” and “Doing much more together” – are appreciated. The scenarios shall create a frame and routing of debates on the EU's future by 2025. Attention is also dedicated to some weaknesses and deficiencies of the White Paper, and to some other reflections and aspects of the next EU27.

**Key words:** European Union, scenarios of the next EU's development, the EU27's future

### 1 Introduction

On 1 March 2017 the European Commission presented a White Paper on the Future of Europe, setting out the main achievements of the European Union (EU): a peace spanning seven decades and an enlarged Union of 500 million citizens living in freedom in one of the world's most prosperous economies. The White Paper also addresses the challenges that the EU is facing and so presents five scenarios for how the Union could evolve by 2025, depending on how it chooses to respond.

The White Paper looks at how the EU will change in the next decade, from the impact of new technologies on society and jobs, to doubts about globalization, security concerns and the rise of populism. It spells out the choice we face: being swept along by those trends, or embracing them and seizing the new opportunities they bring. The EU's population and economic weight is falling as other parts of the world grow.

The White Paper has been the Commission's contribution to the Rome Summit of the EU of 25 March 2017, and has sought to outline different ways for building a united EU at 27 Member States. It is the start of the process, not the end, and a wide-ranging and honest debate will now take place between the national governments and peoples of the EU on where our common future lies and what degree of ambition we hold. (EU PRESS RELEASE 2017)

The various changes affecting the world and the real sense of insecurity felt by many have given rise to a growing disaffection with mainstream politics and institutions at all levels. This often manifests itself through indifference and mistrust towards the action of public authorities. And it also creates a vacuum too easily filled by populist and nationalist rhetoric. However, citizens' trust in the EU has decreased in line with that for national authorities. Around a third of citizens trust the EU today, when about half of Europeans did so ten years ago.

Closing the gap between promise and delivery is a continuous challenge. This is partly because the EU is not an easy construct to understand as it combines both the European level and Member States. Who does what is not well explained enough and the EU's positive role in daily life is not visible if the story is not told locally.

Restoring trust, building consensus and creating a sense of belonging is harder in an era where information has never been so plentiful, so accessible, yet so difficult to grasp. The nature of the news cycle is quicker and harder to keep up with and respond to than it ever has been before. More tweets are now sent every day than in a whole year ten years ago. And by 2018, around a third of the world's population will use social media networks.

These trends will only accelerate and continue to change the way democracy works. This creates new opportunities to facilitate public debate and to engage Europeans. However, the EU and its Member States must move quicker to interact with citizens, be more accountable and deliver better and faster on what has been collectively agreed.

### 2 The reviewing of the Commission's scenarios

The five scenarios presented in the White Paper cover a range of possibilities which are considered by the Commission. (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2017) They are not exhaustive neither are they mutually exclusive. The scenarios, being easily identifiable from various aspects of historical development of the European Communities (EC) and the EU, offer a series of glimpses into the potential state of the Union by 2025 depending on the choices we will jointly make. The starting point for each scenario is that the 27 Member States move forward together as a Union.

## 2.1 Scenario 1 “Carrying On”

*The EU27 focuses on delivering its positive reform agenda in the spirit of the Commission's New Start for Europe from 2014 and the Bratislava Declaration agreed by all 27 Member States in September 2016.*

In the first scenario where the EU27 sticks to its course, it focuses on implementing and upgrading its current reform agenda. Thus, the 27 Member States and the EU institutions pursue a joint agenda for action. The speed of decision-making depends on overcoming differences of views in order to deliver on collective long-term priorities.

The scenario is supporting the EU's way towards the federative structure, what is hardly acceptable for a big majority of the Member States. For example, creation of a flexible common European army is an exaggeratedly optimistic goal. Similarly, it refers to effective management of external borders of the EU or to reforming State aid law ensures that 90% of all State aid measures that will be in the hands of national, regional and local authorities.

## 2.2 Scenario 2 “Nothing but the Single Market”

*The EU27 is gradually re-centered on the common internal market as the 27 Member States are not able to find common ground on an increasing number of policy areas.*

This scenario is also too optimistic because the EU27 cannot agree to do more in many policy areas. So it should increasingly focus on deepening certain key aspects of the single market. But, there is no shared resolve to work more together in areas such as migration, security or defense. As a result, the EU27 will not step up its work in most of policy domains, cooperation on new issues of common concern is often managed bilaterally.

The functioning of the internal market becomes the main reason of the EU27's existence. Further progress depends on the capacity to agree related policies and standards. However, differences persist or increase in areas such as consumer, social and environmental standards, as well as in taxation and in the use of public subsidies. It will be also difficult to agree new common rules on the mobility of workers or for the access to regulated professions. As a result, the free movement of workers and services will not be fully guaranteed.

The EU struggles to conclude deals with its partners. Migration and some foreign policy issues are increasingly left to bilateral cooperation. Humanitarian and development aid is dealt with nationally. The EU as a whole can be no longer represented in a number of international forums as it fails to agree on a common position on issues of relevance to global partners such as climate change, fighting tax evasion, harnessing globalization and promoting international trade.

Differences of views between Member States on new emerging issues often need to be solved bilaterally, on a case-by-case basis. Decision-making may be simpler to understand but the capacity to act collectively will be limited. This widens the gap between expectations and delivery at all levels.

## 2.3 Scenario 3 “Those Who Want More, Do More”

*The EU27 proceeds as today, but in addition it allows willing Member States to do more together in some specific areas. One or several "coalitions of the willing" emerge in different policy areas. These may cover policies such as defense, internal security, taxation or social matters.*

New groups of Member States might agree on specific legal and budgetary arrangements to deepen their cooperation in chosen domains. This can build on the shared EU27 framework and will require a clarification of rights and responsibilities. The status of other Member States is preserved, and they retain the possibility to join those doing more over time.

A group of Member States can decide to cooperate much closer on defense matters, making use of the existing legal possibilities. This will include a strong common research and industrial base, joint procurement, more integrated capabilities and enhanced military readiness for joint missions abroad.

Several countries might move ahead in security and justice matters. They can decide to strengthen cooperation between police forces and intelligence services. They will exchange all information in the fight against organized crime and terrorism related activities. Thanks to a joint public prosecutor's office, they will be able to collectively investigate fraud, money laundering and the trafficking of drugs and weapons. They can decide to go further in creating a common justice area in civil matters.

A group of countries, including the euro area and possibly a few others, can choose to work much closer notably on taxation and social matters. Greater harmonization of tax rules and rates might reduce compliance costs and limits tax evasion.

Further progress could be made at 27 Member States to strengthen the single market and reinforce its four freedoms. Relations with third countries, including trade, remain managed at the EU level on behalf of all Member States.

This scenario might be indeed regarded as actual because it, in the best way, reflects historical development of the EU and its multispeed forms (e.g. Schengen or Eurozone). The unity of the EU at 27 shall be preserved while further cooperation is made possible for those who want. Citizens' rights derived from EU law will vary

depending on whether or not they live in a country that has chosen to do more. However, even now serious questions arise about the transparency and accountability of the different layers of decision-making.

#### **2.4 Scenario 4 “Doing Less, More Efficiently”**

*The EU27 focuses on delivering more and faster in selected policy areas, while doing less where it is perceived not to have an added value. Attention and limited resources are focused on selected policy areas.*

In this scenario where there is a consensus on the need to better tackle certain priorities together, the EU27 can decide to focus its attention and limited resources on a reduced number of policy areas. Thus, the EU27 may be able to act much quicker and more decisively in its chosen priority areas. For these policies, stronger tools are given to the EU27 to directly implement and enforce collective decisions, as it does today in competition policy or for banking supervision. Elsewhere, the EU27 can stop acting or does less.

The EU27 can thus stop acting or do less in domains where it is perceived as having more limited added value, or as being unable to deliver on promises. This includes areas such as regional development, public health, or parts of employment and social policy not directly related to the functioning of the single market.

New standards for consumer protection, the environment and health and safety at work will move away from detailed harmonization towards a strict minimum. More flexibility is left to Member States to experiment in certain areas. However, for those domains regulated at the EU level, greater enforcement powers should ensure full compliance.

According to the scenario, the EU’s weight in the world will change in line with its recalibrated responsibilities. To start with, the EU27 will have real difficulty in agreeing which areas it should prioritize or where it should do less.

#### **2.5 Scenario 5 “Doing Much More Together”**

*Member States decide to share more power, resources and decision-making across the board. Decisions are agreed faster at a European level and rapidly enforced.*

In this scenario where there is consensus that neither the EU27 as it is, nor European countries on their own, are well-equipped enough to face the challenges of the day, Member States can decide to share more power, resources and decision-making across the board. Hence, cooperation between all Member States may go further than ever before in all appropriate domains.

The scenario supposes far greater and quicker decision-making at the EU level. However, there is the risk of alienating parts of society which feel that the EU lacks legitimacy or has taken too much power away from national authorities.

### **3 Some weaknesses and deficiencies of the White Paper**

The White Paper is too general, exaggeratedly optimistic and unilaterally directed which shall offer mainly “milk and honey” or “lovely tomorrows” for the EU27’s future. However, a spirit of economism and populism are governing in the document, the goals and priorities of the future Union are formulated on behalf of these entities (e. g. to achieve savings in tax and social spheres which belong more to a centralized federal state than to any integrating formation). The document shapes a frame, content and tendency of discussions on the future EU. The presented aims, priorities and expectations are coming from the highest European level (similarly, as it was in a case of the unsuccessfully ratified draft of the EU’s Constitutional Treaty in 2005). The “dream” of the supranational governmental elite, expressed in the White Paper, probably will hardly find any majority support among Member States.

The supposed scenarios are not anything new in evolution of European Integration. They occurred in the past within development of the EC and later the EU, in some attempts to incorporate various forms of political cooperation into the main stream of European Integration (such as e.g. the processes routing to the creating of the European Political Cooperation and the internal security platform TREVI, as well as the processes aiming at revisions of the founding Treaties of the EC and EU).

The White Paper speaks nothing about some manifestations of traditional national egoism of some big states (namely, Germany and France) within the functioning of the Union and their influence on decision-making in European institutions. The document neither makes reference to the existing deficit of democracy in the EU, to its reasons and its gradual elimination, to some disintegrating phenomena in the Union and their origin, to multiculturalism and political correctness (as strange features in functioning the EU) and their dangerous influence on the next EU27 (namely in a human-rights agenda), and thereafter to on how cultural-civilization fundamentals the future EU shall be built (or will the contemporary weakening of the traditional Christian-Jewish cultural values go on or not?) In the text of the White Paper there is also missing any critical view on allegedly large-scale bureaucratic centralism in Brussels and its reducing, on some well-known incorrect steps and deficiencies in decision-making of the European institutions (mainly the Commission) which have put some tensions into the Union’s life and relations between Member States.

The White Paper does not bring forward any origin and reasons of Brexit, extremism and radicalism in the EU, nor their analysis. The knowing of these phenomena is extraordinarily important for preventing the next moments of disintegration of the Union.

In the foreign-political sphere the Commission has not evaluated any backward impact of the introduced anti-Russian sanctions on the EU and its internal unity. For this reason, as supposed, various facts have confirmed a negative influence of sanctions on the functioning and development of the very EU. Thereinafter, the White Paper does not mention of the issue of future relations of the EU with the US, as a strategic partner, under rule of Administration of President Donald Trump, nor reacts to his strategy “negotiate only bilaterally with Member States, not with the EU as one bloc”.

#### 4 Conclusions

In the White Paper, the Commission promises to host a series of debates on future of the Union across Europe's cities and regions in the coming months to harvest and harness opinions on the desired way forward and will further contribute to the process with a series of reflection papers on developing the social dimension of the EU, deepening the Economic and Monetary Union, harnessing globalization, the future of the EU's defense and finance.

The reader is not to ask how this utopian state of affairs in scenarios four and five came to pass, for these are circular arguments and will not unravel. The White Paper itself says that “Too often the discussion on Europe's future has been boiled down to a binary choice between more or less Europe. That approach is misleading and simplistic.” The Commission offers a more graduated (quintuple) choice, but it's still misleading and simplistic. And even, though the White Paper offers the get-out clause that “there are many overlaps between each scenario and they are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive,” the effect is still to discourage honest intellectual engagement.

For each scenario, the White Paper sets out a description of what the EU might look like in 2025, the pros and cons, and a grid showing the impact on policies, plus “illustrative snapshots.” Every scenario defines how things will develop; if things were to turn out differently, it would not be the same scenario. Nevertheless, one begins to doubt the distinction between political choice and wishful thinking.

On trade agreements, for instance, the status quo scenario would mean: “The ratification process is lengthy and often delayed by discussions and disagreements in some national and regional parliaments.” Under the “Nothing but the single market” scenario, however, “the EU fails to agree on new trade agreements as Member States are unable to agree on common priorities or some block ratification.” Under scenario four, “Doing less more efficiently,” trade is one of the policies that the EU27 decide to prioritize, so, by definition, “The EU is able quickly to negotiate and decide trade deals.” And in the end, under the fifth scenario “Doing much more together” trade agreements can be actively pursued, initiated, negotiated and swiftly ratified by the EU on behalf of its 27 member states.

In fairness, it should be acknowledged that the Commission has promised to publish in the coming months five reflection papers on social policy, globalization, economic and monetary union, defense and the EU's finances. Those might belatedly provide greater intellectual substance to go with the White Paper, but it will probably be too late – the reductionism will have taken hold.

The White Paper should serve to steer the debate among the 27 Heads of State or Government and also be used by the Commission as the starting point for a wider public debate on the future of our continent.

The EU's future may not officially be on the ballot in the upcoming elections in the Netherlands, France, Germany, and Italy, but the results will go a long way towards determining the Union's fate. Anti-EU sentiment is more widespread than ever, as demonstrated by the feverish campaigns of right-wing populist insurgents. But there are also signs of support for revamping and reinventing the EU.

After all, the central issue facing the Union is not sovereignty, as often claimed mainly by the extreme right-wing politicians, but it is democracy. What the EU needs today is a treaty that expands democratic legitimacy at the European level. Preserving national sovereignty strictly based on institutions designed for the far less integrated European economy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a recipe for failure. (REICHLIN, L. 2017)

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