

Klemens Joos is the founder of EUTOP, by its own admission the largest owner-managed governmental relations agency in the EU. In the early 90s he was one of the first to help companies voicing their causes in the European Union.

LARS PETERSEN

He is also a Professor of Business Studies, specializing on Political Stakeholder Management, at the Technical University of Munich, and is reputed to be a top expert on Brussels. We asked him about the vital nerve of the EU and why so many citizens do not recognise the value of Europe until it comes under pressure.

WELT: You have been monitoring the EU since the early 90s when you founded EUTOP. Has Europe become more effective in all that time or just more complex?

KLEMENS JOOS: Both. The EU has become significantly more effective in regard to its legal basis. The Maastricht Treaty was the Big Bang of the political European Union back in 1993. And constitutionally, the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 was de facto the birth of the United States of Europe. A lot of people have not understood the full extent of this EU integration yet.

WELT: So how far does it reach then?

JOOS: Very far, although it has taken two goes to accomplish, and the first attempt was dashed against the will of the people. The Treaty of Lisbon, which led to this massive boost in integration, is around 90 percent identical to the original constitutional treaty. While the latter was signed on 29th October 2004 in Rome, it was defeated by referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005 and therefore never came into force. In a way, the decorations were taken off the Christmas tree, but the same tree was reused, and a Treaty that had only slightly been modified was put to the vote a few years later. The Treaty was then ratified during the financial crisis brought about by the collapse of Lehman Brothers, which overshadowed other issues such as the deepening of the EU. If all decision-makers and citizens of the member states had understood on what they were deciding at the time it would probably not have passed. Fortunately it did, though.

WELT: Where in particular is the agency of the EU apparent?

JOOS: When the Treaty of Lisbon came into force on 1st December 2009, some political areas such as internal affairs, justice, agriculture and foreign trade, which had until then been regarded as central to the sovereignty of the member states, were switched from unanimity to qualified majority voting in the Council of the EU. This abolished the member states right of veto in these political areas and replaced it with the principle of the qualified majority. Significantly more decisions have been made at EU



© Nadine Stegemann

'Trump is an absolute godsend for the EU'

Europe often appears to be slow and indecisive, but the Union is far better than its reputation would suggest, says consultant and EU expert Klemens Joos

level since then, which has massively fostered the authority of this level. In addition, the European Parliament has been an equal-status decision-maker in virtually all areas since 2009. Not only the representatives of the member states, i.e. the heads of state and government, and the EU Commission are making decisions in central political areas, but all three institutions. Due to this communitisation the EU has externally become significantly more effective and is, with the exception of foreign and security policy, no longer dependent on the approval of each individual member state.

WELT: Why has the EU become more complex at the same time?

JOOS: Since the Treaty of Lisbon, we have been dealing with complex and extensively impenetrable multi-level decision-making processes between the EU Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. Decisions are not possible unless these three levels collaborate. Some figures to illustrate this: the EU Commission is currently made up of the President, six Vice-Presidents and 20 Commissioners. These are joined by 32,000 officials, the actual Eurocrats. The 720 Members of the European Parliament have around 8,000 employees. The Council of the EU consists of hundreds of ministers from all 27 member states; they are being supported by over 2,500 contributors of the General Secretariat. And let's not forget the 27 heads of state and government with their centres of government.

WELT: And what is the consequence of this?

JOOS: A system of 'decisions without decision-makers' has arisen. Outsiders are often unable to understand who has made which decisions. In my conviction, this is the underlying reason for the diverse feelings of alienation and powerlessness many citizens, business and also politicians themselves experience in some cases – feelings that are being exploited by populists from both the right and the left spectrum. Moreover, there are no governmental or oppositional political groups in the European Parliament. The EU Commission needs a majority for each decision in the European Parliament, so its situation is similar to that of a minority government in the German Bundestag.

WELT: So you're saying that the EU has become stronger, but governing is becoming more difficult?

JOOS: Exactly. The EU is externally effective, because it has gained more authority with the Treaty of Lisbon. Internally, however, the complexity has increased, so decision-making processes in the context of the ordinary legislative procedure lead to unpredictable results, which is why the EU institutions installed the 'informal trialogue'. It is the single most important decision-making committee in the EU today. Representatives of the EU Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU meet for informal discussions in order to define viable compromises for all due decisions at the earliest possible point in time. Its success is impressive: almost 90 percent of

all legislative acts in the ordinary legislative procedure are passed after the very first reading and become final on publication in the Official Journal. Due to the confidential nature of the consultations, however, the trialogue, which is not even mentioned in the Treaty of Lisbon, is a black box, which does not make the decision-making processes any more transparent. Quite the opposite: whoever wants to understand the EU must first understand the processes involved in this practice.

WELT: Why does the EU fascinate you?

JOOS: In terms of peace and economy, Europe is a political success story which is still very attractive for other states up to the present day. And despite all legitimate criticism of various details, we should not forget that, after signing the Declaration of Independence in 1776, it took the United States of America a civil war and nearly 100 years to complete their unification process. The constitutional Treaty of Lisbon was only signed 16 years ago. And people are not shooting each other in the EU. That alone is a precious asset.

WELT: Are we not patient enough with Europe?

JOOS: Yes, and this impatience is sometimes rooted in ignorance. While we have learnt that democracy and compromising are painstaking, the number of the couch potato-minded is increasing: if something doesn't work right away, they switch to something else. But reaching and maintaining success is demanding – in business, in associations and also in politics.

WELT: You were even talking about a renaissance of the EU. Why?

JOOS: Because the EU is protecting us: from internal military conflicts, from external aggressors and from trade wars. It gives us the necessary amount of significance in a neo-regionalised world, which is increasingly splitting into conflicting blocs as the age of globalisation comes to an end. 451 million consumers live in the EU Single Market, more than in the USA. And one of the EU members is France, a nuclear power. Only the EU is able to establish itself as a third pillar of the new world order alongside the USA and China.

WELT: Which reforms are needed to make the EU even more effective?

JOOS: Firstly, the right of initiative for new legislative acts, which has so far been held solely by the EU Commission, must be extended to the Council of the EU and the European Parliament to eliminate the bottleneck of the EU Commission. Secondly, a parliamentary majority should generate and support the EU Commission so it does not have to seek new majorities for each legislative act like a national minority government. As an 'emergency construction', the informal trialogue must not permanently remain the central forum for agreement, because the EU needs more transparency, more responsibility and more political clarity. Thirdly, no more unanimity in common foreign and security policy.

WELT: How realistic is that?

JOOS: I am certain that the process required for this will emerge at the latest when the next new member state joins, because unanimity will be needed for this accession. At the same time, this enables the bundling of larger packages. In the past, I would have said: It will take up to twenty years to reach that day. Today I believe: It could happen in as little as five years. Because Donald Trump is introducing a new dynamic, and also an additional sense of urgency in times of crisis, in the shaping of the EU future. In that sense, Trump is an absolute godsend for the EU. Without him, many would not understand how glad we can be that the European Union exists and how important its development is.