

Main article (p.32-33):

Is Europe falling apart due to the refugee crisis? On the contrary: The European Union will emerge from this test stronger than ever. Says Dr. Klemens Joos.

WHY EUROPE IS SO STRONG

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The refugee crisis is a tough endurance test for the EU, maybe the toughest one since 1945.

Hundreds of thousands of people are fleeing to the EU. Today, nobody is able to present a resilient plan to regulate the influx of people and to get the situation under control. More and more politicians are sounding the alarm – from mayors to heads of government. Historical conflicts are coming to the boil. It sounds credible when the President of the European Commission Juncker stresses that, day and night, Brussels is fighting against the impending catastrophe.

Commentators are talking about a "crucial test" for the EU. Similar to the Grexit discussion, they are asking the question: Will the EU break to pieces?

The clear answer is: no, the EU cannot and will not disintegrate and thereby revert to a continent of nation states. These kinds of bleak conjectures stir up fears that are without any foundation.

The great misunderstanding of these weeks and months is the claim that the current crises uncover the fragility of the EU. The very opposite is the case: the crises prove in an impressive way that today, the structural links between the EU member states are so profound, politically as well as in the prepolitical sphere, that none of them would even remotely be able to risk a break-up – even if the general media coverage so far makes it sound differently.

Casually speaking, even if a country wanted to leave, it would not be easy for it to do so.

As unmanageable as the refugee crisis may seem, as uncertain as its outcomes may appear from

today's perspective, as great as the differences of opinion between the individual EU member states may be, and as obvious as the difference in mentalities, interests and engagements concerning many other points may be – it is practically impossible to withdraw from the EU.

Certainly, according to the EU Treaty, every member state can voluntarily leave the EU. But in practice, that is no longer conceivable.

Why? Because for several years, especially since the Treaty of Lisbon took effect in 2009, we have been living in a new reality, a reality of which Winston Churchill or Helmut Kohl used to dream. It is called the United States of Europe.

A state territory de facto exists between Portugal and Finland, Ireland and Cyprus. Yet, the decisive reason for the indissoluble connection of the EU member states is a different one: through the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, the members transferred a large part of their national sovereignty – and thus power – to the EU institutions.

I sometimes ask myself, in view of the discussion, whether certain political decision-makers at the time were really aware of these consequences.

The Commission, the Parliament and the Council are today's impulse generators. The legal acts that originate there have overshadowed the significance of national legislation. These days, in the engine room of Brussels, hundreds of regulations and directives are produced year after year, White and Green Papers are published, subsidies and customs are specified and many more legislative and executive measures are adopted.

They concern the majority of the policy areas of all EU members and have gradually established a sort of common DNA. Member states would no longer be able to extricate themselves from this structure, not without causing massive harm to their citizens and their economy. Greece is the best example.

The refugee crisis, in connection with the Treaty of Lisbon, shows something else also: how many times have the heads of state and government met and stayed up all night for "refugee summits" in the last few weeks, in view of an impending humanitarian catastrophe?

The results so far have merely been minimal compromises that many consider unsatisfactory.

There is a structural reason for that: the considerable increase in the power of EU institutions, as mentioned above, has made the institutional network much bigger and more complex. Decision-making processes are non-transparent and their results have become difficult to calculate.

That is not only true in terms of the acute refugee crisis. It is true for almost all decisions. There is no obvious leader anymore.

The Treaty of Lisbon has made the previous co-decision procedure a standard procedure ("ordinary legislative procedure"): the Commission proposes a law. Subsequently, the Parliament and the Council of Ministers vote on the subject.

For the common interest, this is a good thing. The formation of a majority takes place throughout all member states and parliamentary groups – in the European Parliament, there are no government and opposition parties.

Therefore, many more participants than in the past are now involved in the decision-making process. Countless factors come into play. The formal and informal decision-making procedures are thus difficult to understand.

In summary, the EU and its member states continue to be in the middle of a strenuous yet unavoidable process.

This process is important and right for the EU, allowing it to evolve as an efficient, highly complex apparatus and to establish itself as a legitimate decision-making centre in Europe. This means that,

together, the community of states will gradually internalise and further develop the ideas and visions of the United States of Europe. In any case, that does not happen overnight.

How should it? The Treaty of Lisbon, which can practically be identified as a sort of "hour of birth", has only been in force for six years. In contrast, when looking across the Atlantic, we realise that it took revolution, war and almost a century before the United States of America started living up to its name and became a truly lived and practised reality.

In comparison, the EU is still in its infancy.

We must be aware of these connections, in order to be able to classify the current crises in the EU, and especially their management, correctly. The Greek and refugee crises have hit the EU hard.

Both are perceived as painful and have triggered complex political and civic processes. Fast, simple decisions cannot be expected here.

Nevertheless, these processes do not threaten, but strengthen, the community of states. These crises help ensure that the next steps of the European integration process can be taken.

With every solution to a problem, the equipment for future conflicts grows as well. The spectrum of legislative and executive instruments becomes bigger and more substantial. The United States of Europe is de facto six years old and well on the way to reaching adulthood very soon.

Infobox (p.33):

A FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

In his new book, Klemens Joos explains how businesses successfully bring in their interests into the EU

Truth requires only few words – or few abbreviations. Joos captures his knowledge as a researcher and his 25-year experience of professional practice in a nutshell:

The formula aims to explain how successful lobbying (SL) works in the EU. For this, an interplay of content competence (CC) and process structure competence (PStC), i.e. the competence, to act within the whole EU and to have access to networks. For this job, a professional "intermediary" is required. Two further parameters are the key features of the formula. The perspective change competence (PCC) means to act on behalf of your own interest in a way that it unfolds into a common interest perspective. Ultimately, process support competence (PSuC) is the ability of the intermediary to structurally and sustainably support all EU-wide interfaces daily for his client in a meticulous manner.

Joos is convinced that the formula has "universal character". In any case, Joos' new book ("Convincing Political Stakeholders", Wiley publishing company) has got what it takes to become standard work – especially because it explains the EU's mechanisms in a surprisingly exciting manner.

Caption: Trio of researchers; Joos with co-authors, LMU professors Anton Meyer and Armin Nassehi (r.)