

THINK TANKS' THOUGHTS

Europe's People's Forum has selected various think tanks' articles focused on themes that we find most current and interesting for the activists, politicians and connoisseurs engaged in the policies of the European Union. The articles were published in the second quarter of 2018.

EU's Future institutional Structure and Policies

2019 will be a rather dangerous year for the EU. In addition to a populist wave which could send the share of populist MEPs to a record high at the European Parliament election, new presidents be elected/appointed to lead the European Commission, the European Council and the European Central Bank. In [Now or never, Notre Europe](#), former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta, now President of Notre Europe – Fondation Jacques Delors, argues that Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron have the duty to come up with urgent, concrete and ambitious reform proposals for Europe to prevent a political earthquake which could endanger the European venture as a whole. These proposals should cover the migrant crisis, defense and security, the setting up of a European monetary fund and the completion of the economic and monetary union.

EU Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly reflects in [How transparent are the EU institutions, CEPS](#), 23/05/2018 about her action after 5 year in office in Strasbourg and a previous 10-year experience as Irish Ombudsman. Transparency around EU decision-making procedures is the largest concern. Her office receives around 2,000 complaints a year and opens some 300 inquiries. The EU has high transparency standards relative to some Member States but law making remains an area where progress is needed, especially in the Council. Ombudsman O'Reilly recommends that the positions of Member States in the Council should be automatically recorded and that Council documents be made public. She identifies the "revolving door" issue as another challenge. The Commission needs to be mindful of perception by the general public. Transparency is the answer and ensuring that it is complied with is an ongoing battle.

Policies on Migrants and Refugees, Schengen and Development Aid

Stefan Lehne argues in [The EU Remains Unprepared for the next Migration Crisis, Carnegie Europe](#), 03/04/2018 that the Schengen system could be wiped out if the EU failed to reach agreement on collective action to address the challenges of a new wave of migration. He stresses that Member States reacted to the migration crisis with a logic of re-nationalization of policies, quite the opposite to the federal solutions they had put in place to reinforce the monetary union at the time of the 2008 financial crisis. The author advocates an integrated asylum system at European level, notably with the creation of a specialized EU agency, and a stronger coordination of migration policy among Member States to face the crisis and prevent any risk for the Schengen area.

A discussion paper prepared by Marie De Somer warns that the absence of political leadership on the reform of the Dublin system and the protection of the Schengen agreement could cause the collapse of both systems altogether [Dublin and](#)

[Schengen, A tale of two cities](#), EPC. This would in turn create major damage to the public perception of EU action on border control. Initiatives have to be taken on the two fronts to protect the accomplishments to date and to reflect on a effective European response to the currents challenges.

EU-policies on Social dimension, Labour Market Protection and Trade Agreements

In [How Angela Merkel’s “Gift” of Goodwill Could Boost Beijing-Berlin Trade Ties at Donald Trump’s Expense](#), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,, Eric Brattberg and Philippe Le Corre argue that the trade war engaged by Donald Trump with his traditional allies could trigger the development of stronger ties between Germany and China around the need to strengthen multilateralism. Yet, there are limits to working with China on the trade front and Chancellor Merkel are aware of them. China remains a strong offender of international rules. Reciprocity and market access are tough issues with Chinese authorities. The situation created by Donald Trump’s aggressive unilateralist policies opens a window of opportunity for China.

Climate change

Concluding a one-year consultative project ([Developing the EU long term climate strategy](#), Bruegel, March 2018), Andrei Marcu and Georg Zachmann stress the need for the EU to come up with a renewed climate strategy going beyond the engagements taken in 2011 in its 2050 Roadmap. This is necessary to keep in line with the contents of the Paris agreement and to take into account recent evolutions. The authors insist that the strategy should address the social and economic impacts of proposed measures in order to ensure the transition is sustainable. Such a strategy is the adequate tool as it factors in the limited European Commission power to push top-down legislation and enables transparency, i.e. it encourages critical participation by all relevant stakeholders. This is a key condition of success for the EU and a continuation of its worldwide leadership in the climate change area.

Democracy, Citizens, Human Rights and Independence of Media

The deterioration of the rule of law in **Hungary and Poland** has dramatically impaired the independence of NGOs and the remit under which these watchdog organizations were engaging. Civil society space is shrinking. To counter this situation, the EU should progress towards the establishment of a mechanism for democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights and make a particular spot for civil society organizations in this monitoring process. It should further create a financial mechanism to provide financial support for civil organizations in order to counter the restrictions imposed on access to funding for NGOs - [First victims or last guardians? The consequences of rule of law backsliding for NGOs: Case studies of Hungary and Poland](#), by Malgorzata Szuleka, CEPS.

Martin Michelot examines how the values and the foundations of the European Union are challenged from the inside by Hungary and Poland [How can Europe repair breaches of the rule of law?](#), **Notre Europe**. Depriving Poland of its voting rights in the Council under Article 7 of the TEU will not materialize due to the Hungarian veto preventing a unanimous vote in the Council. The idea has emerged to link compliance with EU values and regulations with the access to structural funds. This is more powerful but comes also at high political risks. Martin Michelot underlines the need to develop reflection and tools beyond article 7 of the TEU and to engage civil society organizations for that purpose.

A policy paper proposed by Daniel Debomy [They love me, they love me not, they love me a little, Public opinion and the European Union in the Visegrad countries](#), **Notre Europe** provides interesting information on the state of public opinion in the Visegrad countries about the European Union. Czechs and Slovaks tend to be more cautious than the Poles and the Hungarians. What the paper especially shows is a shared level of anxiety in the 4 countries which in turns casts useful light in the context of opposition by most of them to major European initiatives, notably on migration.

In [Exploring Transatlantic Responses to Far-Right Populism in Europe](#), **Chatham House**, Jacob Parakilas and Thomas Raines summarize the conclusions of a simulation event on the rise of a populist authoritarian regime in an EU Member States. The perception is that a move by the European Commission or a Member State would be reactive in nature, not preemptive. The authors conclude that there is a need to better understand the warnings ahead of any populist slide and engage early on in response to them.

In [Involving millennials in politics](#), **FEPS**, Maria Freitas examines the question of re-engaging young people into politics and making political organizations fit for it. Politics is not perceived as appealing by millennials. They tend to see parties and politicians as distant from day to day realities and believe that their views are not reflected. To change this, the paper argues that participatory channels within political parties should be reinforced, especially through online forums and e-consultations. Internet voting and the lowering of the voting age are also seen as necessary steps to encourage millennials to engage. Above all, citizenship and civic education are critical to create interest and foster confidence in political engagement.

EU citizens have the feeling that they are not being heard properly on EU issues. In [How Citizens Can Hack EU Democracy, Carnegie Europe, 02/05/2018](#), Stephen Boucher argues that several initiatives (“democratic hacks”) should be taken to reverse this perception: the creation of a Citizen’s Committee for the Future in the European Parliament, the establishment of an EU participatory budget and an EU collective intelligence forum. Interestingly enough, such proposals have been put in place in some Member States or regions (Finland and its Committee for the future; Scotland and its Future’s Forum). Why not an EU participatory budget?

Brexit Negotiations and National Political Issues.

The majority of Italy's public opinion has turned against the EU. It is a major shift since the start of the European integration process. The populist parties which won the recent general election make the EU the scapegoat for poor internal consumption and soaring unemployment. Some even suggest leaving the Euro. Yet, the reality is that the Euro is not responsible for the current Italian situation. In fact, other countries which also had to reduce their deficits under EU supervision delivered results and are now recovering forcefully. According to Daniel Gros, poor policy governance largely explains why Italy did not rebound as expected. The solution is to be found at national level and requires an absolute willingness to fight off corruption and other conflicts of interest [Who lost Italy, CEPS](#).

The world was stunned by the rise and success of Nikol Pashinyan, now Prime Minister of **Armenia**. However, according to Amanda Paul and Dennis Sammut, the expectations created by the Armenian "velvet revolution" risk to be disappointed, especially in the absence of a popular mandate obtained through a general election and in the context of the complex relations between Armenia and its most immediate neighbors, notably Russia. A popular mandate is needed to give Pashinyan the necessary time and legitimacy required to conduct socio-economic and governance reforms and to keep a close eye on foreign policy issues - [Armenia's "Velvet Revolution": Time is Pashinyan's worst enemy, EPC](#).