

# Working Paper

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## Brexit – how can diplomacy help saving the EU-27?<sup>1</sup>

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*Brexit* should be seen as a window of opportunity for change: fostering debate among populations as well as fresh thinking about the diversity of European cohesion and about the fabric that can hold the EU together. New generations might have different understandings of the purposes and methods for the social development of Europe. While the reestablishment of peace and economic reconstruction formed the original purposes for European integration, the EU is now facing the social challenges of adaptation to globalization.

**Social cohesion** within and between the societies of EU member states should be creating and driving the political will of governments to act upon. Cohesion is about feeling of belonging, shared interests and mutual dependence. It involves trust in the recognition and management of expectations, grievances, needs and social emotions through collective action and can lead to a functional identity. Specifically, it should address the public imagination and the concerns of the many citizens who have not felt the benefits of free trade and globalization and who believe that their distinct national identity and culture is under threat.

Representing the views of European public opinion, including eurosceptic positions, and their commitment to wanting more popular autonomy would create a new European order as a general feature of human diplomatic interaction with a functional division of power and participation in governance, a self-perception of effective diplomacy and a self-legitimization of a European practice.

Key to the new role, strength and legitimization of the EU is its citizens' support for effective joint problem- and conflict-solving (**pragmatic solutionism**), demanding not institutional reforms but a **transformation in the political and bureaucratic mind-set**. The proposed solutionism provides legitimacy and collective governance beyond the state, breaking with »business and bureaucracy as usual« by the present inter-elite management.

This concept is based on the reactivation – in the public discourse as well as the political management - of two fundamental dip-

lomatic principles as drivers of Europe's future: subsidiarity and solidarity.

**Functional subsidiarity** means that powers should be exercised as close to the citizens as possible. Therefore, the EU should not involve itself in everything or harmonize every last nut or bolt. The EU should focus on the things that member states cannot do efficiently on their own and that create mutual gains. It should only intervene in precise and limited conditions, when objectives cannot be sufficiently achieved by Member States. This principle (Art. 5 (3) of the Maastricht Treaty) has been frequently neglected and ignored in all practical matters; making subsidiarity something akin to a marketing gimmick.

Saving the EU will require it to relinquish some of the powers it has seized and usurped from Member States (renationalization for sovereign responsibility). In order for democracy to thrive and for the EU to survive, the principle of subsidiarity must finally be put to the centre of European policy.

The recent European Commission's White Paper on the »Future of Europe: Reflections and Scenarios for the EU27 by 2025« (March 1, 2017), in its Scenario 4: »Doing less more efficiently«, has chartered the course: In order to better align promises, public expectations and delivery, the EU should choose and tackle certain priorities and recalibrate its responsibilities accordingly, while doing less where it is perceived not to have an added value. The White Paper suggests the following examples: cooperation on external border management, asylum policies and counter-terrorism in order to act much quicker and more decisively.

In consequence, the EU should concentrate and streamline its efforts on its core issues: in response to public demand and domestic audience expectations it should deal with specific, limited problems and topical challenges of political and social urgency and provide practical, sustainable solutions, and not be bogged down in institutional, procedural and personal infighting. Leaders and their bureaucracy can best restore citizens' faith in EU's ability to address their problems and build public support by turning plans and projects into

action and tangible results that lend new credibility and legitimacy to the EU.

The recent European Commission's White Paper on the »Future of Europe« suggests an open, honest and wide-ranging debate with citizens as a catalyst of progress on how Europe should evolve in the years to come. The format for such a Europe-wide public consultation on the future of Europe could be inspired by the pilot project practiced by the German Foreign Ministry since its Review 2014 process: the so-called **Open Situation Room**. The Open Situation Room can be understood as a contemporary adaptation of the »Situation Room« that US President John F. Kennedy created for discussing acute crisis situations. While this closed situation room was used for gathering government experts, today's Open Situation Room brings together – in publicly accessible locations – involved citizens, experts on specific subjects, innovators, creative problem-solvers and practitioners from a variety of fields. In this way, the Open Situation Room supplements the classical crisis meeting by providing representatives of other disciplines and viewpoints with a forum to discuss foreign policy challenges. The goal of this unconventional approach of citizen participation is to gather their views and expectations and draw new audiences into the discourse in order to create an additional body to generate new ideas and utilize the treasure trove of varied experience present in such a heterogeneous group.

The future of diplomacy might very well look more like a co-working space, where collaborative brainstorming formats like the Open Situation Room are organized to tap the knowledge, ideas and expectations of creative people from all walks of life.

In this context of preventing conflicts and building peace, it is suggested to consider the diplomatic approach of »neo-functional peace«: This concept is aiming at protracted conflicts (involving highly political and sensitive questions of sovereignty, recognition and political autonomy) by deconstructing the contentious issues into smaller acceptable technical and everyday decisions, thus reframing them, shifting language and grounds of interests leading to specific policy resolutions. This practice and process-

driven approach is situational, flexible and contingent to the political will among parties to find technical outcomes to questions as a transitory way towards normalizing and reconciling relations; rather than being bogged down in a high-level political dialogue.

The best way forward in this direction would be to revitalize the transnational ethics of **effective EU-wide solidarity**, not as a law of EU integration but as an actionable principle of legitimacy consolidating its political and moral affirmation and – eventually – its institutional survival. The EU should be setting up new mechanisms for promoting solidarity, such as a joint refugee and migration fund, which could make up the difference in temporary shortfalls in local funding and help member states more effectively share the burden of integrating new migrants across Europe. The challenge is to replace the crisis of solidarity with the concern for the other (alterity).

Turning European solidarity into action in situations of disaster and crisis such as mass migrations or terrorists attacks would reconcile complex interests and preserve the peaceful order while supporting humans in need. It could be welcome as a symptom of shared responsibilities and social distributive justice within European society.

A creative approach to **Post Brexit Diplomacy** and its civilizing virtues (solidarity, subsidiarity, inclusion of the general public, acceptance of change as opportunity) could provide the practical values for a result-oriented **mind-set of problem-solving**. This diplomacy focusing on tangibles will project a specific blend of realistic assessment and idealistic aspiration. The changing nature of issue-related decision-making would move foreign policy from consensus to intergovernmental and transsocietal ad hoc coalitions, building public support by taking into account diverse domestic audiences and the dynamics of international public opinion. Greater public contestation may be an essential ingredient for more democratic decision-making in the EU-27 to arrive at common solutions for shared problems.

At best, the EU-27 can lead with values translated into core actions. In practicing the expected interconnectedness of values

and actions, the EU-27 should do, what it says and stands for, and what Europeans believe in and want it to accomplish, and it should say, what it does. This concept would provide new, badly needed political and social energy to the European project (transformation into a Europe of projects) in order to disperse the public apprehensions against an »ever closer union«. The EU-27 does not need any more rules; it needs political leadership and the courage to act, reweaving the bond between citizens and Europe. The present dysfunction of the EU (»more of the same«) is no more sustainable. It is time to grasp the »European moment« against the wave of »new isolationist nationalism«. Otherwise, the dream of a peaceful, common future within the European Union could unravel, and European stability – as a pillar of the post-Cold War order under challenge – would not be far behind.

### Recommendations:

- For diplomacy as social interaction to be successful in the context of Brexit we need innovative and reactive practical initiatives (instead of clinging to traditional »procedures«);
- Moving from values-based, formal integration of states to social cohesion within and between societies of EU member states;
- Instead of grand strategies the EU should regain popular support, trust and legitimacy through effective joint problem-solving (pragmatic solutionism);
- In response to public demand, the EU should concentrate on its core issues by deconstructing complex contentious issues into smaller acceptable technical and everyday decisions;
- The EU should reactivate two of the fundamental diplomatic principles as drivers of Europe's future: functional subsidiarity and effective solidarity;
- Europe-wide public consultations (town hall format) on the future of Europe could be inspired by the German pilot project of Open Situation Rooms.

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**Wilfried Bolewski** was a German Ambassador and Chief of Protocol for Chancellors Schröder and Merkel. He closely observed international diplomatic practice at the highest level. As Professor of International Law and Diplomacy he has been teaching at Freie Universität Berlin, Sciences Po Paris, the American University of Paris and the American Graduate School in Paris. He is an Associate Editor of the new journal »Diplomacy and Foreign Policy« (Brill Research Perspectives in Diplomacy and Foreign Policy).

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