

Beyond Weimar !

Why our common European democracy is needed more than ever !

by Yves Bertoncini, Dr. Linn Selle, Marcin Świącicki
the Presidents of the European Movement in France, Germany, Poland

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“Initiative for Europe”, “Awakening of Europe”, “Union of Nations 2.0” – these catch words were produced by our governments and their representatives in the past years. “Getting Europe right” and “Renewal of Europe” are the latest demands of leading politicians of our countries. True, none of our governments is content with the current state of the Union. Even EU treaty changes are back on the agenda, in order to make our continent fit for internal and external challenges.

Our three countries have a special responsibility. Germany and France shall be free of pretentiousness towards the rest and especially the east of the continent. Berlin and Paris must invest in more multilateral diplomacy beyond Franco-German declarations. The traditionally freedom orientated Poland shall become again a driving force for a pan-European pluralistic democracy. Precondition is the respect of the rule of law as enshrined in Article 2 of the EU Treaty. But we should be honest not to come back to old “Weimar Triangle” rhetoric. It doesn’t exist since a long time. We should invest in a multilateral pluralistic course, where internal and external challenges can be openly discussed among all European stakeholders. The Weimar Triangle, if reinvigorated, shall be just one of many platforms for political debate.

Could Sibiu be a chance for democratic competition and pluralism?

On Thursday the heads of state and governments will meet in Sibiu, Romania, ahead of the European elections, the greatest democratic achievement in post war Europe. One of the driving forces for a reform debate which led to the “Road to Sibiu” was the destructive Brexit decision which united the EU27 and increased the support for EU integration among the citizens. But neither numerous speeches, nor endless demands to answer far going visions and numerous but half-heartedly carried out “citizen debates” led to concrete actions. We are afraid that Sibiu will follow the nicely written Berlin, Bratislava and Rome declarations: without consequences. Again, there will be proper wording to describe the great European project. To “*defend one Europe — from East to West, from North to South*” is right but will be not enough. The chancelleries of our national governments are not any more driving forces for change towards a stronger pluralistic European democracy.

No more summit bla bla

The heads of state and governments are meeting just ahead of the European elections. But even this time they will state their capacity to overrule the outcome of the European Parliament elections. When they will meet again just some days after the election, they will follow one common denominator: they will have the temptation not to give the European Parliament a decisive voice in the election of next EU Commission president. It is true, the outcome of our next European election will follow a national trend, the fragmentation of party families. However, the overall majority of the European electorate wants a strong democratic Europe. Nationalistic destructive forces can and must be beaten by a constructive competition for the best policy.

Future power to Parliament

The European Parliament – the only directly elected representation of European citizens – must become the hub for a parliamentary democracy order. We need right of legislative initiatives by Parliament. A transparent and competitive process of the two law making institutions, the legislative chambers Council and Parliament must also be ensured. EU will be less paralyzed and more effective when qualified majority voting in Council is extended. We need a new election system where transnational lists, protection of minorities and representation is key. This will need a treaty change. But it will be a major step forward in reduction of democratic deficit and the promotion of European fundamental democratic values and the rule of law.

Challenges ahead

Nuanced communication at an early stage and open dialogue are effective means of combating the loss of trust in politics, also at trans-European levels. Political actors who have democratic legitimacy and social groups must reinforce each other in honest competition across all levels.

Europe should stay as the leader in protecting climate, ensuring the most ambitious social model, providing prosperity across its all regions. The 4 freedoms of the European integration: the free movement of goods, capital and services and especially persons need a careful as well as sustainable governance. Effective support for regional development can be achieved by consolidating existing agricultural and regional policies as well as competition-oriented investment programmes. Smart instruments in European public diplomacy and defence cooperation are needed.

Our societies need a public competition of the best ideas and concepts how to achieve a common European welfare system.

But there is also a need for external border management of the EU which establishes a high-level control of immigration as well as the highest possible humanitarian solidarity with refugees. Common intelligent governance is able to ensure a strong and open Schengen area. Our aim must be the largest possible region of free movement within the EU.

Our ambition must be to set the best governance standards all across South Eastern Europe. We need a prosperous Western Balkan for a stable Europe. The 'Berlin process' towards integration of the Western Balkans should strengthen its efforts to involve, and give efficacious support to democratically organised forces within the EU and the Western Balkans. Stability, solidarity and strategic responsibility of a wider democratic Europe shall be also ensured by smooth implementation of the Association Agreements with Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia and Georgia.

Investment in European democracy is an investment in future. We must revitalize and enlarge our capacity for democracy on all levels of our European society. But this investment must go beyond European institutions. Let's strengthen the democratic midfield between our countries, stakeholders and first and foremost the citizens of Europe.