

interview _____

Rainer Münz

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Given your expertise in the social policy field and looking at the big picture of demographics, would you share with our readers your main points of view on the current global demographic trends and, in particular, on the EU demographic trends?

On a global level, life expectancy is increasing, while fertility is falling or remains at lower levels. These have been the main trends since the 1970s. Both trends - though largely unrelated - contribute to demographic ageing. Today the EU sticks out because we Europeans - together with Japan - have the oldest population and the lowest number of children per woman. Europe is the first continent where population growth comes to an end. It is very likely that the number of people living in Europe will be smaller in 25 or 50 years than it is today. The same will be true for Russia, Japan and Korea, but also for China as a late consequence of its one-child-policy. This will be a particular challenge as it might lead to competition between China, Europe and North America in the global race for talent and skills... [p.2](#)

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opinion _____

Juncker, Schulz, Verhofstadt: Candidates for the Presidency of the European Commission

The elections for the European Parliament are approaching and this event will cause several changes to the European political scene. One of the most important modifications is related to the elections for the leadership of the European Commission. In this regard, the main European parties, EPP (European People's Party), PES (Party of European Socialists) and ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe) have designated their candidates ... [p.3](#)



“In the medium and long term Europe faces a serious shortage of labour and skills.”

In a Europe still dominated by an economic crisis that tends to look more towards itself and to be rather reluctant to accept migrants, what should be the best approach for the EU with regard to the migration policies? Moreover, given the EU enlargement to the East and the constant concern regarding the labour migrants to the West, in your estimation, what effects could the removal of restrictions have on the Community labour market?

There are two types of migration in the EU: (a) mobility between EU Member States and (b) immigration from third countries. Despite popular misperceptions, myths and fears, the current mobility between EU Member States is too low. There are not enough EU citizens moving from poorer regions with high unemployment to richer regions lacking labour and skills. The reasons for this are manifold: linguistic and cultural barriers are of influence. But some potential migrants are discouraged by a lack of recognition of their acquired skills. But for obvious reasons, home ownership, family ties and children at school age also reduce mobility.

In the medium and long term Europe faces a serious shortage of labour and skills. In a not so distant future more mobility between EU Member States will not be sufficient to close the gaps. Europe will be in need to attract migrant workers of different skill levels on a permanent basis.

Unfortunately a growing number of Europeans do not see more mobility between EU Member States and - in the medium and long-term - more qualified immigrants from third countries as an appropriate answer to demographic ageing and labour shortages, but rather as a threat.

The Euro zone crisis seems to have descended to a more manageable size as the monetary news tends to become more optimistic. Having in mind your professional experience, what should be done next in order to use

this opportunity for further advance in the EU economic governance reform?

The good news is: the EU has survived the first test of the Euro by the financial markets. And Europe has developed rescue mechanisms. The Euro zone has not fallen apart. On the contrary: countries with difficulties serving their sovereign debt - including Cyprus, Ireland, Greece, and Portugal - have been rescued. The Eurozone countries have even developed a roadmap towards a banking union.

The bad news is: many EU Member States are highly indebted. Total sovereign debt in the European Union has increased by more than 25% of GDP since 2007. In the coming years Europe needs to balance fiscal prudence with the right dose of investment in areas vital for its future. These include spending on research and infrastructure, as well as on education.

You have been actively involved in the process of creating “a more perfect Union” in Europe. In your view, given the current state of debate, how should the future EU look like? What is still to be done?

The European Union aspires to be a global player in the 21st century. A look at the EU budget today shows how hard and ambitious this is, since the EU budget only represents 1% of Europe’s GDP. It is much too small to engage in any significant macro economic policy. And it leaves relatively few foreign and security policy options on the table. On top of this, most of the EU budget is allocated via subsidies to the agricultural sector and to disadvantaged regions. This is definitely good for peripheral regions, but the spending is almost irrelevant for Europe’s competitiveness and the role the EU plays in the world. Actually, this should be changed. A more perfect Union will need more resources.

Interview by Mihai Sebe

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Rainer Münz has worked as consultant for the European Commission, the OECD and the World Bank. He served as an advisor to the Greek (2003), Dutch (2004) and Slovene (2008) EU Presidencies. In 2000-01 he was member of the German Commission on Immigration Reform (Süssmuth Commission). Between 2008 and 2010 he was Member of the high level “Reflection Group Horizon 2020-2030” of the European Union (so-called “EU Group of the Wise”).

<http://www.bruegel.org/about/person/view/210-rainer-munz/>

Juncker, Schulz, Verhofstadt: Candidates for the Presidency of the European Commission



The elections for the European Parliament are approaching and this event will cause several changes to the European political scene. One of the most important modifications is related to the elections for the leadership of the European Commission. In this regard, the main European parties, EPP (European People's Party), PES (Party of European Socialists) and ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe) have designated their candidates.

In order to be appointed head of the European Commission, candidates have to wait for the results of the elections for the European Parliament. According to the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament will then decide after considering the position of the European Council and by "taking into account the outcome of the European elections", as established by

Article 17.7 of the Treaty on the European Union. The same legislative act provides that encourages European political parties designate their candidates before the suffrage. Thus, following internal elections, Jean Claude Juncker (EPP), Martin Schulz (PES) and Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE) have become the prospective candidates.

Notwithstanding the fact that all candidates are well known in the European political setting, Martin Schulz' name is probably the most familiar in Europe and Romania, as a consequence of being the current President of the European Parliament. Guy Verhofstadt is a former prime-minister of Belgium, and Jean Claude Juncker has been prime-minister of Luxembourg.

Given that the European Union faces great challenges, such as the enlargement, the crisis in the European Union neighbourhood (Ukraine) and the discontent of European citizens, it is important to emphasize that the President of the European Commission is the one that points out the direction the EU will follow. Therefore, this function brings a considerable stake into play.

In this context, Martin Schulz has already expressed his view regarding the future path of European Union. He often referred to the economic measures which Member States must consider. In an interview for Agerpres Martin Schulz said that *"European elections are very important for the EU capacity to find viable solutions to the current challenges, especially to tackle the economic crisis. Unfortunately, the anti-European forces try to take advantage of this difficult economic situation and spread their xenophobic and extremist messages. It is important to take a clear stance and defend mobility rights against this backdrop. Therefore, the recent resolution of the European Parliament on respect for the fundamental right of free movement in the EU is to be saluted."*¹

Furthermore, for Schulz, euroskepticism can be countered by implementing social programmes meant to reduce youth unemployment.²

Guy Verhofstadt expressed a point of view similar to that of Schulz regarding the European route, identifying the same immediate challenges for the European Union. Among these, Verhofstadt mentioned the necessity of an enhanced degree of Europeanization, of a fiscal and economic union and of a banking union, as soon as possible, thus ensuring a future for the subsequent generations on this continent.³

Soon after being nominated, Jean Claude Juncker stated his desire that in the electoral campaign discourses be focused on the real Europe, the Europe as it has been envisioned by those who, after World War II, returned from the battlefield and set up this political programme⁴.

Although leaders of different political parties, Juncker and Verhofstadt have similar views when it comes to the way they perceive the European integration, both of them proving federalist penchants and making a case for a return to the original method of governance⁵ of the EU, the community method. Both of them bolster a higher budget of the European Union, although Verhofstadt wishes to bring forth a "revolution" in this regard, intending to change the taxation system, considering that the EU should be financed by its citizens and not by the Member States. This revolution would cut back on the influence of the nation-states, thereby leading to a closer relationship of the citizens with the institutions of the European Union.⁶

¹ <http://www.agerpres.ro/english/2014/03/06/interview-schultz-i-will-appeal-to-romanians-to-go-to-the-polls-in-may-because-those-elections-are-very-important-10-49-21>

² <http://www.theparliament.com/latest-news/article/newsarticle/martin-schulz-commission-candidate-race-real-chance-to-increase-voter-interest-and-turnout/#.UyeJNfldWq0>

³ <http://www.euronews.com/2014/02/01/liberals-confirm-guy-verhofstadt-as-nominee-for-european-commission-president/>

⁴ <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/epp-elects-juncker-as-candidate-for-ec-presidency-1.1716631> <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-03-07/juncker-beats-barnier-to-nomination-as-eu-commission-race-starts.html>

⁵ <http://uk.mobile.reuters.com/article/stocksNews/idUKLNEA0J00P20140120>

⁶ <http://en.theeuropean.eu/guy-verhofstadt--2/8168-guy-verhofstadt-about-his-vision-for-europe>

Moreover, this might lead to the possibility of endowing the citizens with further rights, an act which could enhance Union's legitimacy in the eyes of citizens.

However, Jean Claude Juncker encounters the opposition of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who would have preferred that Christine Lagarde, the Director of the IMF, be the EPP candidate⁷. This opposition originates in the previous criticism by Juncker of the so-called attempt of the big European countries to monopolize power during the crisis⁸. It is important to mention, nonetheless, that, under current circumstances, big states are those that carry the European Union.

It is also worth mentioning Martin Schulz's viewpoint concerning the governance of the European Union, which can be summarized as considering necessary an increase of the power of the European Parliament and of the European Commission, which should be a natural ally of the former⁹.

Returning to the similarities of the candidates, Verhofstadt and Schulz expressed a common desire to enhance the turnout at the European elections. Thus, Verhofstadt deems obsolete the old debates about the "democratic deficit", since this deficit should be reinterpreted as manifesting itself in the low involvement of the European citizens in the electoral process¹⁰. Likewise, Schulz considers that reforms are necessary in order to bestow a lost legitimacy upon the European Union. However, he claims that a solution to this issue is the resurgence of the welfare state¹¹.

Yet we cannot talk about who is more likely to be elected in place of José Manuel Durão Barroso. All these predictions can be made only after the European elections and especially after the meeting of European leaders on 27 May 2014¹². Nonetheless, what should not be ignored is that the new President of the European Commission will play a central role in the evolution of the European Union, since "the Commission is a target for anyone who wishes to influence the content of the policies"¹³.

Mădălina Ungureanu, intern
Adelin Dumitru, intern

event

Debate: Preventing Violence Against Women: a Challenge for Us All (Gala Club - Le Theatre)

On 7 March, the European Institute of Romania, in partnership with the European Parliament Information Office in Romania, has organized a debate entitled *Preventing violence against women: a challenge for us all*. In the opening session, Mrs. Mădălina Beatrice Mihalache, Acting Head of the European Parliament Information Office in Romania and Mrs. Gabriela Drăgan, PhD Professor, General Director of the European Institute of Romania, expressed their interest on this topical subject. The debate was divided into three panels of discussion, the first of which focused on the impact of economic crisis on gender equality and women and EU's position on violence against women and ways of combating all forms of discrimination against them. The second panel focused on preventing violence against women at a national level and finally, the third panel focused on the role of civil society in preventing violence against women.

In the opening of the first panel of discussions, Mrs. Renate Weber, Member of the European Parliament, Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, emphasized the role and the objectives of the European Parliament, the body that manages to put the topics of interest on the agenda while it remains for the Commission to subsequently establish the



guidelines. Although there is a real concern with regard to fighting violence against women, just as important is the manner and level to which this concern is transposed in the Member States.

⁷ <http://www.eurasiareview.com/12012014-merkel-doesnt-support-juncker-commission-president/>

⁸ <http://uk.mobile.reuters.com/article/stocksNews/idUKLNEA0J00P20140120>

⁹ <http://uk.mobile.reuters.com/article/stocksNews/idUKLNEA0J00P20140120>

¹⁰ <http://en.theeuropean.eu/guy-verhofstadt--2/8168-guy-verhofstadt-about-his-vision-for-europe>

¹¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/20/us-eu-schulz-idUSBREA1J1LY20140220>

¹² <http://www.euractiv.com/eu-elections-2014/van-rompuy-gathers-eu-leaders-in-news-533196>

¹³ Hellen Wallace, „O anatomie instituțională și cinci metode de politici”, in Hellen Wallace, Mark. A. Pollack, Alasdair Young, *Elaborarea politicilor în Uniunea Europeană (Policy-making in the EU* - translated into Romanian by the European Institute of Romania), București, Institutul European din România, 2011

Mrs. Norica Nicolai, Member of the European Parliament, Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, discussed the importance of implementing a trustworthy legal or social body and the need of changing the mentality that characterizes today's society on women's rights. Violence against women is a current phenomenon, both at the EU level and globally, and solving this problem would inevitably lead to the resolution of cases of gender discrimination, these two big problems being linked, according to Mrs. Nicolai. Concluding, she said that the European Parliament is taking steps forward, a good example being the Resolution of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, which contains recommendations to the Commission on combating violence against women but it must also implement and promote policies and rights of women in such a situation.

In the second panel of discussion it was shown that on a national level an important step was taken by the introduction of Law 25/2012 regarding the modification and supplementing of Law No. 217/2003 on preventing and combating domestic violence, the state having the role of promoting this legal instrument. Non-governmental organizations have an important role in this process, having proved on countless occasions their involvement and effort in this direction. In Romania, the number of women involved in cases of domestic violence has increased substantially largely due to the lack

of legal education on the subject. The insufficiency of human resources and services that address this issue is a real problem at a national level, which leads to the perpetuation and worsening of this situation for women experiencing some form of violence against them. Although some steps have been taken in combating violence against women at a national level, it is however necessary to implement a strategy focusing primarily on the prevention of this type of conflict, thus avoiding in the future a possible transfer to future generations.

The third panel "Preventing violence against women: a challenge for us all" focused on the role of civil society in preventing domestic violence and approached topics such as civil society involvement in improving practices and legislation on the protection of victims of domestic violence and the programs and actions of NGOs in combating gender violence. Among the ideas presented in this panel, it was emphasized that the statistics found in the national and international reports do not accurately reflect the situation of violence against women in Romania but are rather the "top of the iceberg" because most victims refuse to communicate the problems they face within the family.

Ruxandra Popescu, intern

Debate: Past, Present and Future in the European Construction Process

The Europe Direct Information Centre - Bucharest hosted by the European Institute of Romania organised on 14 March 2014 a debate entitled "Past, present and future in the European construction process", as part of the project "Vote for Europe! Vote for you!" financed by the European Commission. The goal of the project is to involve citizens in the political life of Europe and to mobilize them to vote in the European Parliament elections on 25 May 2014.

The event was moderated by Mr Adrian Cioroianu, PhD Professor, Dean of the Faculty of History, University of Bucharest, while speeches were held by Mrs Renate Weber, MEP, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Mr Cristian Dan Preda, MEP, European Popular Party (Christian Democrat), Mr Ioan Mircea Pașcu, MEP, Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, Mr Bogdan Murgescu, PhD Professor, Faculty of History, University of Bucharest and Mrs Gabriela Drăgan, PhD Professor, Director General of the European Institute of Romania.



The session of speeches was opened by Mrs Renate Weber who emphasized the role and importance of the European Parliament as an EU institution. She noted that the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group that she is part of has supported the inclusion of the "youth issue" on the 2020 Agenda. The ERASMUS+ program was launched with around 6000 grants allotted for Romanian students. She concluded her speech mentioning that "many of the things that happen in our daily lives are decided at the European level" and that people should be aware of the importance of their vote.

Mr Cristian Dan Preda raised two questions: "Is lack of information a cause of the low turnout in the elections?" and "To what extent is the population's vote influenced by associating candidates to political parties?" In order to answer the first question, the guest noted that "the relation between information and turnout is complex". Since 1979, when the first elections for the European Parliament were held, to 2009 there has been a clear decline in the turnout. However, during this period the influence of the European Institutions has grown, as have the sources and the access to information. Thus, Mr Preda concluded that the issue is not the lack of information, but the way it is managed. "Information should be sorted, packaged and distributed" he mentioned.

As for the political affiliation of candidates, the MEP considers that people vote according to the political colour more than according to the topics on the agenda of the candidates. Mr Preda also noted that there is a tendency to politically brand themes as left - right (especially in fields such as finance, economy, energy), which leads to a more difficult compromise implying reports with more amendments.

He concluded mentioning that people must be aware that the European Parliament is an institution which represents the European common interest and not the national ones.

Mr **Ioan Mircea Pașcu** brought up the idea that a crisis influences the political context in which elections take place and the fact that there is a division of preferences between austerity measures and those for economic growth. He also mentioned that, this year, the political stakes at the national level are high in many countries (including Romania) and, therefore, parties will probably try harder to mobilise people to go to vote.

Emphasizing the important role the European Union had in the process of consolidating the Romanian institutions, Mr **Bogdan Murgescu** added that EU citizens should take seriously their role as stakeholders and that the interest of countries and of all citizens is that the Union evolves in a favourably way. Thus MEPs have to contribute directly to the European Union's interests.

In conclusion of the debate, Mrs **Gabriela Drăgan** pointed out that this year is an important one for the European Union (the structure of the European Parliament and of the European Commission will change, the President of the European Council will conclude his mandate). A better communication between Members of the European Parliament and citizens is, thus, highly recommended.

Irina Coman, intern

EU

European Economic Forecast – Recovery Gaining Ground

The European Commission's Winter Economic Forecast was delivered to the public on 25 February 2014, during a press conference. The economic forecast analyses the situation of the 28 European Union Member States, the candidate countries, the Euro zone, as well as of some countries outside the European Union for a period of two years (the current year and the next one).

The analysis results show that the European economy is on its way to recovery, both by improving economic indicators and by enhancing living conditions. Nevertheless, as Marco Buti, Director General at DG Economic and Financial Affairs, stated "the consequences of the crisis are still holding back growth and job creation and could do so for some time".¹

At the European Union level, a slight increase of the economy is noticed, after coming out of recession in spring 2013 and following three consecutive quarters of subdued recovery. This reflects the fact that the recovery of the European economy which continues to spread in all European countries is due to the impact of increasingly reduced economic and financial crisis on macroeconomic indicators.

According to the forecast for 2014, the GDP grew by 1.5% in the EU and 1.2% in the Euro area, compared to 2013, when it increased by only 0.1% in the EU and fell by 0.4% the Euro area. General estimates show that activity will increase in 2015, the GDP increase reaching 2.0% in the EU and 1.8% in the Euro area.

On the other hand, inflation will register a rate of 1.2% in the EU and, respectively, 1.0% in the Eurozone, while, starting this year, it is expected a slight increase in employment rate and a decrease in the unemployment rate up to 10.4% in the EU and to 11.7% in the Euro zone by 2015. In 2014 it is expected that the overall fiscal deficit will fall to 2.7% of GDP in the EU and 2.6% in the Euro area, while the debt ratio in GDP will reach nearly 90% in the EU and 96% in the Euro zone.

Romania's situation is a positive one, being among the countries with good economic growth estimates for this year. In 2013, according to the statistics, Romania registered a GDP growth of 3.5%, which was driven by exports and an abundant harvest. For 2014 a ratio of 2.3% is estimated, followed by a slight increase in 2015 to 2.5%. The investments are sustained by a better absorption of structural and cohesion funds. They increased in 2013, reaching until the end of the year a rate of 33.7%.

¹ European Economic Forecast Winter 2014 http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/european_economy/2014/pdf/ee2_en.pdf, p. ix

Regarding the inflation rate, Romania reached a rate of 1.3% at the end of the last year, due to agriculture and reducing VAT on flour and bakery products². A decrease of the inflation rate from 3.2% in 2013 to 2.4% in 2014 is expected, due to lower food prices.

In 2013, the unemployment rate reached 7.2% and in 2014 it is expected to reach a similar level, before declining slightly in 2015, when the political measures will be implemented, particularly on reducing youth unemployment.

Romania's budget deficit fell from 3% of GDP in 2012 to 2.6% in 2013, supposedly reaching 2.2% in 2014 and 1.8% in 2015. The public debt is expected to reach slightly above 39% of GDP in 2014³.

While the forecast remains positive in terms, the risks continue to predominate. Both at the EU and at the Member States level there are many problems to be solved, in order for this improvement to occur and to have positive effects on the enterprises and population.

For more information, you may consult:

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/european_economy/2014/pdf/ee2_en.pdf

Bogdan Comşa, intern

European Parliament - Plenary Session, 10 – 13 March 2014, Strasbourg



Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/european_parliament/

The concern for the situation in Ukraine and an update of EU data protection legislation were the major topics during the March session. MEPs adopted tougher anti-money laundering rules. At the same time, the campaign for the European elections of 22 - 25 May is heating up as the political parties name their candidates to the European Commission's presidency. MEPs adopted a resolution requesting that as many members of the next Commission as possible be chosen from among elected members of the EP in order to honour the European citizens' choice.

The report on *Stricter rules against money laundering* to combat tax evasion was followed by the plenary debate. The UN estimates that every year money laundering amounts to 2-5% of the world's GDP. MEPs in the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs updated and amended the directive on money laundering. Thus, public central registers will contain information on the final ownership of all types of legal persons,

including companies, foundations and investment funds.

MEPs recalled the connections between money laundering and terrorist attacks in Europe, including the one in Madrid on 11 March 2004, when TNT charges were detonated on four trains, resulting in almost 200 dead and more than 1 460 wounded. Therefore, the persons who report such activities of terrorist organisations must enjoy a protection guaranteed by the states.

A series of joint declarations, by the Council and the Commission, were followed by debates. MEPs expressed their views on the *European Council's agenda for 20-21 March*, during a debate with the Commission President José Manuel Barroso and the Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Dimitris Kourkoulas. The items on the agenda include the European Semester, industrial competitiveness, climate and environment policies, preparations for the coming EU-Africa Summit and relations with Africa.

The concern for the *situation in Ukraine* materialised in an EP resolution urging Russia to withdraw its military forces immediately from the Ukrainian territory. MEPs condemn the "act of aggression in invading Crimea", deemed a breach of international law, and stress that Crimea's plans for a referendum on the accession to the Russian Federation will be considered illegal. Moreover, MEPs consider the acts undertaken by Russia as posing a threat to the security of the EU.

The protection of personal data by EU law was assessed by Commissioner Viviane Reding as part of European citizens' rights and as a European value. The joint debate by the European Commission and Parliament shows that differences among provisions on personal data protection, within the 28 legal systems of the Member States, cause high costs every year. The benefits of a unique system will be equally shared by companies (through the existence of a European authority) and

² Idem, p. 92

³ Idem, p. 93

by citizens. They will be easier to protect and easier to defend through the coherent mechanism to be put into place.

Other topics for debate included: genetic resources; fluorinated greenhouse gases; EU Strategy for the Arctic; Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund; and Internal Security Fund.

In connection with the update to EU radio equipment laws, MEPs called for a common charger for all mobile phones sold in the EU. Therefore, waste, costs and users' efforts will be reduced.

The EP's inquiry into mass surveillance schemes by the US National Security Agency (NSA) was finalised with a resolution, whereby MEPs warn that the EP's consent to the EU-US trade deal "could be endangered" if the scheme does not stop. The

resolution provides that EU should suspend its bank data deal with the US and the "Safe Harbour agreement" on data privacy, since the fight against terrorism can never justify secret and illegal surveillance.

In addition, MEPs voted in favour of draft legislation to streamline air traffic management, so as to make Europe's airlines more competitive, which will help to share airspace better and reduce pollution.

For further information, please see <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/en/pressroom/press-release/plenary>

Mariana Bara

Spring European Council: 20 – 21 March 2014

In an increasingly worsening socio-political environment, the heads of state or government convened for the Spring European Council have nonetheless managed to put forth a series of measures which might change both the structure of the European Union and its role in the world. Thus, the European Council discussed extensively the situation in Ukraine and decided to prepare the signing of Association Agreements with Georgia and Moldova. Reiterating the old ties with Africa¹, it was decided that the European Union should get more involved in the sense of "promoting trade and development, democracy and good governance, the rule of law and human rights"². Furthermore, aspects pertaining to the European industry and economy have been emphasized and possible solutions for recovery have been proposed. Last but not least, a "crucial step towards a stronger and more resilient Economic and Monetary Union"³ has been made, since an agreement has been reached regarding the Banking Union. These conclusions of the European Council, which have been mentioned briefly hitherto, will be given now a more comprehensive look.

First of all, in order to alleviate the departure from the social targets caused by the economic crisis⁴, a great deal of time has been dedicated to the European Semester. According to the documents released after the European Council⁵, among the priorities have been policies aimed at improving competitiveness, cutting down on the unemployment, especially youth unemployment and reforming the labour markets. In the same spirit, the European Council has welcomed the agreement of the European Parliament and of the Council in regard to the Single Resolution Mechanism Regulation, stressing the paramount importance of adopting the Regulation before the end of the current legislature. In the light of a recent report emitted by the Commission⁶ on the state of negotiations on savings taxation with European third countries (Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Andorra and San Marino) the European Council called on the Commission to ensure that talks will have closed by the end of the year. Furthermore, the European Council aims at aligning exhaustively the European Union legislation with the new global standards, as illustrated by the endorsement of the adoption of the Directive on Administrative Cooperation as soon as possible.

Economic growth has been superseded since the commencement of the crisis by plans to ensure a decent level of subsistence to citizens of countries most stricken by this unfortunate event. However, as Mr. Van Rompuy stated, taking into consideration the recent improvements in the European Union, it has been decided that advantage should be taken of "this relative respite, precisely to tackle difficult economic reforms"⁷. Indeed, the EU, with the exception of laggards such as Cyprus and Slovenia, proved to have a resolute economy, its GDP being estimated to grow by 1.5% this year.⁸

However, in order to keep the pace, the European Council announced its determination to enhance competitiveness, considering a better regulation as an important prerequisite.⁹ Moreover, "Efforts must continue to complete and to fully exploit the potential of the internal market in goods and services, including in the digital economy, and to foster entrepreneurship".

¹ Multilateral cooperation with African countries is inextricably linked with the origins of the European Economic Community, part 4 of the Treaty of Rome announcing the creation of the European Development Funds. Afterwards, the Lomé Convention could be considered a critical juncture towards the new way of relating to the former European colonies. See for instance http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/acp/overview/lo-me-convention/index_en.htm, or <http://mondediplo.com/1998/06/08lome> for a more skeptical view (seeing the Lomé Convention as an instance of "falling into line with the dogma of globalisation")

² http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141749.pdf, p. 15

³ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141749.pdf

⁴ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141706.pdf, p. 2

⁵ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141749.pdf

⁶ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-172_en.htm

⁷ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141706.pdf

⁸ <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2014/03/european-economy-guide>

⁹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141749.pdf



Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/europeancouncil/>

Instruments such as Horizon 2020, the Connecting Europe Facility and the European Structural and Investment Funds should be used to promote industrial competitiveness. Particular focus will be given to ensuring that people acquire the necessary skills, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) skills being a priority, since there is a lack thereof throughout the Member States.

When it comes to climate and energy, the European Council affirmed its propensity to ensure that substantial progress is made in reducing greenhouse gas emission, and attaining targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency. A priority is represented by the implementation of all the measures “to meet the target of achieving interconnection of at least 10% of their installed electricity production capacity for all Member States”.

In order to solve the persistent problem of Cyprus, the European Council welcomed the resumption of negotiations aimed at reuniting the two parts of the island.

The contentious topic of Ukraine has been tackled carefully by the European Council. Thus, a first step will be the signing of the political provisions of the Association Agreement. This decision shows the openness of the European Union towards its neighbour, notwithstanding the setback at the Vilnius Summit, proving that it endorses the Ukrainian people as well as their right to choose their own future. In addition to the political provisions, the EU and the Member States are “committed to sign the remainder of the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement”, the European Council encouraging the Council and the European Parliament to temporarily remove customs duties on Ukrainian exports to the European Union. Moreover, the European Council urged the Council to agree on a much needed package of macro-financial assistance. In regard to the recent referendum in Crimea, it has been deemed illegal and it has not been recognized, economic, financial and trade restrictions being on the way.

Leniency is not given to Russia, since the next EU-Russia summit has been cancelled, as well as any other summit for the time being, the European Council also supporting suspension of negotiations over Russia’s membership to the OECD. This comes as a consequence of the fact that the European Council “firmly believes that there is no place for the use of force and coercion to change borders in Europe in the 21st century”¹⁰, and of the deep commitment to the values promoted by the Helsinki Conference. In order to deal with this breach of the norms of the Helsinki process, the European Council supports an OSCE mission in Ukraine.

Adelin Dumitru, intern

¹⁰ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141707.pdf

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