



opinion

The European Union and the ‘creative ideal’ promoted by Nicolae Titulescu



Photo: Vasile Pușcaș

Almost 90 years ago, the French Foreign Minister of that time, Aristide Briand, brought to the attention of the League of Nations the *Memorandum on the organization of a regime of European federal union*, a document still analysed by contemporary historiography. This project of a unified Europe came against the background of the intellectual dialogues that followed the First World War, when one of the main topics revolved around the zenith of European preeminence in international relations, as new important actors were emerging. The pan-European idea took the form of a political movement fuelled by Count Coudenhove-Kalergi’s warning, published at first in the European press (1922) and then as a volume (1923), according to which post-war Europe had only two alternatives: “*integration or collapse*”. The various political groups from the European countries reacted with scepticism and indifference to the count’s ideas, possibly because the latter had Austrian cultural roots and his proposal was first launched in the German-Austrian media.

The Great Depression that began in 1929 brought into the spotlight the ‘Spenglerian’ scepticism and, in order to show that Europe was not going to embrace certain collapse, the French Government agreed to put forward, through the work of Minister Aristide Briand, a project of federal reorganization of the continent, based on an intergovernmental formula with a focus on political and economic factors, while safeguarding the national state and its sovereignty. ... p. 2

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The pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-COV-2 is still ravaging health systems and hard testing economies around the world, and the European Union (EU) and its Member States make no exception. Taken for granted by many before, open borders, freedom of movement and their related sense of well-being, of which post-Cold War Europe had gradually become the epicentre, seem more like an elusive luxury nowadays. The crisis sparked by the COVID-19 contagion represents a global borderless and ideology-free challenge, which cannot be defeated in war or constrained through aggressive protectionism. We are not dealing with an American, Chinese or European virus, but rather with a human virus that, at the time of writing, had already killed over 500 000 people worldwide, with over 13 million registered infections. Arguably, this is a shocking and highly consequential moment for post-war Europe and the deadliest and costliest public health crisis on the continent since the so-called ‘Spanish influenza’ of 1918, which had a total estimated number of 50 million casualties¹.

On the short term, the new coronavirus seems to accelerate the process of fragmentation and erosion of the global order, fuelling the descent into nationalism, xenophobia and favouring the strategic dissonance and even decoupling (harming, among others, the resilience of the transatlantic relationship). However, the apparent (and undesirable) retreat of the United States of America (USA) from the helm of the international system in the age of President Donald Trump may actually provide, on the medium and long term, ... p. 3

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The European Union and the ‘creative ideal’ promoted by Nicolae Titulescu

[continued from page 1] In September 1930, the Romanian Foreign Minister Nicolae Titulescu was elected President of the 11th Assembly of the League of Nations. In the European diplomatic milieu of the epoch, the French support for Titulescu’s nomination for the position was well-known, and one of the underlying reasons supposedly had to do with the introduction of the Briand Memorandum in the League’s debate. By then, Titulescu was already known for his firm belief in the principles of international negotiations, of international law and of institutions meant to uphold peace and cooperation. He was the living proof that the relationship between the West and the East was quintessential for genuine European peace and cooperation. One year before his election, Titulescu had spoken in the German Reichstag about how the creation of a European/international community was not about forging a superstate, but rather about a voluntary association of independent states with their own legal framework, built in accordance with their sovereign right.

In front of the same audience, the Romanian diplomat argued that, in spite of the traditional expressions of sovereignty and state independence that characterized those times of crisis, *“state sovereignty, which was other times considered an absolute power, as some minds felt entitled to deny, in general, the mere existence of a real international law, is nowadays considered a self-limiting will, in light of its own independence.”* On the same occasion, the official representative from Bucharest demonstrated that the states’ acknowledgement of international law norms did not lead to subordination, but rather to coordination, and that strength in international relations did not reside only in the power of state, but also in the assertion of the “consciousness of human solidarity”.

In light of this conception, Titulescu supported Aristide Briand’s project of a European Union. And, given that the United Kingdom was rather vocal against the prospect, Nicolae Titulescu went to London to explain that, in the context of the devastating global crisis, the solution could not come from a reversal to the past or obstructionism, but rather from a bold new look towards the future, innovation and reason. In a conference organized at the University of Cambridge (19 November 1930), the Romanian minister pleaded in favour of Briand’s misunderstood and mistreated project, by rejecting existing human prejudices and demonstrating, point by point, that it was the *“sole solution”* for Europe’s peoples to develop peacefully. One of the closing remarks of his Cambridge speech in favour of the European Union noted that: *“It is a generous initiative, meant to bring closer the peoples of the continent that, throughout its history, knew the most wars, in order to help them, freed as much as possible from the burden of conflicts that can be solved through friendly relations, to dedicate themselves, with renewed strength and freedom, to the fulfilment of their obligations as members of the League of Nations.”*

The debate regarding Briand’s project continued through the works of a “Study Commission for the European Union”, under the auspices of the League of Nations and with Briand as President. Nicolae Titulescu, who represented Romania in the Study Commission, actively tried to harmonize diverging opinions and to highlight the value of common ground for the creation of the European Union. Moreover, he always seemed interested in harnessing concrete proposals from the states’ representatives in the Study Commission in order to engage practically in a transition process towards a European Union. To this end, Titulescu deemed necessary that, when enough practical solutions to implement the project were found, a European conference ought to be organized in order to decide upon the way in which states would cooperate inside the European Union.

At the beginning of the year 1931, Titulescu was quite optimistic when he said that *“there are more common points than diverging ones.”* But, given the protracted global economic crisis and the steady progress of totalitarian ideology on the European soil, his vision proved indeed too optimistic. Regardless of the general context, Titulescu seemed adamant in proving the viability of the European Union project, as he insisted on the cooperation between the states of Central and South-Eastern Europe. The states from those geographical areas were called upon to unite in order to achieve prosperity and not to isolate themselves and fight each other. According to Titulescu’s educated opinion, with reference to the European Union project: *“A union never succeeds when it is done against someone; it always triumphs when it is done for something.”*

Throughout the ‘30s, Titulescu continued to support the realization of the European Union project, driven by the ‘creative ideal’ of the Europeans. Without considering himself an idealist (he often used to say that in international politics you should blend idealism with realism), he nevertheless thought that Europeans could form a *“collective soul”*, under the expression of a large racial and cultural diversity. And that is why he strived to accomplish an *état d’esprit* in favour of the creation of the European Union, fighting for what he called the “spiritualization of frontiers” (what we understand today by the four freedoms of the European Union).

I believe, however, that what Titulescu meant by that spiritualization was *“honesty in thought and action.”* In 1937, in a speech delivered at the Comenius University in Bratislava, he clearly stated that, for him, the future should confirm *“a new and solid integration”* not just of states from Central Europe, but applicable for the whole of Europe. His academic address was titled, not by chance, *The order of thought* and, with a reference to his own way of thinking, he confessed that *“in the field of politics, I have always applied the laws of science, and, in the field of science, I have always applied the laws of experience, which life was revealing to me at every step during my political career.”*

Through a filter of judgement specific to the epoch and its people, Titulescu warned in 1935 that the Europeans had to understand the political construct born in the aftermath of the Great War as a reality inscribed in the path of *“continuous growth”*, which parted ways with the pre-war past. He was certain that the United States of America were expecting Europeans to create the “United States of Europe”, as the creative ideal was also sweeping the North-American continent. With reference to the project of European Union, Titulescu said back in 1937 that: *“the creative*

ideal does not only settle for planting in the human soul the seed of faith in a future life, in which wisdom would ally kindness; rather, it demands necessary efforts, however great, in order to integrate in the matter all the instinctive creative impetus of the human soul towards beauty and good; because it is not enough solely to take a glimpse at them, but we must also create them.”

On 1 July 2020, Germany took over the rotative Presidency of the EU Council. It faces a semester filled with formidable challenges caused by complex global crises, but also by a crisis of identity affecting the European Union. We can only hope that, even more so than 90 years ago, the European political leaders will have the courage, vision and determination to present the European citizens with proposals and concrete solutions for these challenges and, why not, to start an honest, serious and applied debate, in the framework of the *Conference on the future of Europe*, about the **creative ideal of a better European Union**. And Romania’s leaders ought to remember the legacy of Nicolae Titulescu - an ardent promoter of the European Union project! A reason for national pride, but also an argument for a great duty towards his memory, towards Romania and its citizens, and also towards the future of the European Union!

Vasile Pușcaș
(article translated by Bogdan Mureșan, EIR)

* Parts of this article were previously published in Cotidianul.ro, July 13, 2020.

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From 2000 to 2008, he was a member of the Romanian Parliament and, between 2000 and 2004, also a member of the Romanian Government, when he acted as the country’s Chief Negotiator for Romania’s accession to the EU; in December 2008, he became Romania’s first Minister for European Affairs.

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EU external solidarity in times of pandemic

Between geopolitical ambitions and ‘coronationalism’

[continued from page 1] the opportunity for the European Union to assert itself ‘geopolitically’ on the world stage, driven by the proverbial *principled pragmatism* enshrined in the EU Global Strategy of 2016².

Taken by surprise initially, like most countries and international organisations, the European Community has quickly mobilised and understood that, first and foremost, the containment and mitigation of the outbreak requires, beyond rhetoric and wishful thinking, European solidarity and a positive synergy between the national and the bloc’s interests, leading to a coordinated, concerted and complementary answer. Ever since the launch of the massive recovery plan “Next Generation EU” by the European Commission at the end of May, the debates revolving around internal solidarity have divided the Union between Member States that favour the common sharing of the economic burden and the so-called ‘Frugal Four’ countries (Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden), which are pushing for a ‘loans for loans’ approach rather than grants and do not wish to become liable for common debt.



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On the other hand, as the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen said, “the virus knows no borders. This global challenge needs strong international cooperation (...) **We all know that only together we can stop the worldwide spread of the coronavirus**”, with reference to the external solidarity of the Union³. On his behalf, Josep Borrell, the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, stressed that “international solidarity is not just a matter of staying true to our values. It is also about making sure that we win the fight against the virus together.”⁴ The external action of the European Union is the main instrument through which it can strengthen its global role, underwrite its geostrategic ambitions and fulfil its normative aspirations. And international solidarity can play a key role and act as a catalyst for common action in the current international context, given that unless the virus is defeated everywhere, it is not defeated at all.

Where can we find the EU’s external solidarity, going beyond the Union’s status as the world’s largest donor of ODA, on the axis between ‘coronationalism’ and the Union’s ambition as a global (and geopolitical) actor?⁵ This research question lay at the of a new collective European Policy Institutes Network report meant to map the domestic reactions, discussions and debates in 13 EU Member States on the topic of external solidarity, herein understood as the imperative to help third countries or third country citizens outside the EU through aid, soft loans or debt relief in order to fend off

the health crisis and to mitigate its still unknown socio-economic and political impact⁶.

I wrote in the report about the situation in Romania at that point (June 2020), noting that the “main public message (...) is that Romania is a team player and a reliable partner, both inside the European Union and for countries in its strategic neighbourhood.” The initiative to establish a strategic rescEU stockpile of medical equipment, as part of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, featured among the priorities of Romania’s Presidency of the EU Council, in the first half of 2019. In April, Romania offered to be the first European country to purchase and host, on behalf of the EU, such a strategic stockpile of medical equipment - a total of 150 ventilators. In terms of bilateral aid, Romania sent medical teams and assistance both to Member States (Italy) and partner countries (Republic of Moldova and Ukraine), and international solidarity was frequently mentioned in official messages from Bucharest. Overall, relative to the 13 Member States analysed, the EPIN report concluded that **the tension between ‘coronationalism’ and a (more) geopolitical Europe will perdure, without a clear-cut trend towards one approach or the other**. A situation likely to persist at least until the closure of the debate around the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the 2021-2027 period⁷.

Under various forms and iterations, ‘variable geometry’ and differentiated integration have been inscribed in the European project’s DNA ever since its inception in the 1950s, touching upon both the internal and the external dimensions of the Union, both horizontally and vertically. As such, it should hardly come as a surprise that the EU is currently lacking a common voice on matters of external solidarity, bearing in mind that it is still lacking a definitive consensus on the domestic front. Excessive worrying and fuelling the related ongoing ‘infodemic’, at least as contagious as the real pandemic, can only prove counterproductive. **The European Union, as an actor with international reach and a major contributor to the integrated system of international aid, has so far promoted a multilateral and coordinated response to the current crisis, in close partnership with the Organization of United Nations (and its specialised agencies), international financial institutions, and through informal frameworks such as G7 and G20**. Unfortunately, its main ally in post-war history, the United States, has turned on some of the very international institutions it was instrumental in creating and questioned transatlantic solidarity during the pandemic, fuelling gloomy scenarios about the strategic decoupling and the imminent demise of the liberal world order⁸.

The external action of the European Union relevant for the support of partner countries fighting with the deadly pandemic has mainly focused on responding to the immediate sanitary crisis and the related humanitarian needs. Also, it aimed to strengthen partner countries’ health, water and sanitation systems, to increase their research and preparedness capacities to deal with the pandemic, as well as to mitigate the socioeconomic impact⁹. **In order to give substance to these actions, the EU and its Member States have committed to a *Team Europe* global response package of almost €36 billion**. The Team Europe approach, launched on 8 April 2020, combines the resources of the EU, Member States and financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Moreover, the EU will provide up to €3 billion of macro-financial assistance to 10 enlargement and neighbourhood partner countries to help them cope with the economic fallout of the pandemic: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Jordan, Kosovo¹⁰, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, Tunisia and Ukraine.

In response to a call from the World Health Organization (WHO) and building on a commitment made by G20 leaders on 26 March, the European Commission hosted in May the Coronavirus Global Response pledging event meant to raise significant funding to ensure the collaborative development and universal deployment of diagnostics, treatments and vaccines against coronavirus¹¹. On that occasion, the Commission registered €7.4 billion in pledges from donors worldwide, which includes a €1.4 billion by the Commission. Of course, this amount is only the beginning of a long process and much more money will be needed as to enhance the testing, treating and preventing capabilities of health systems around the world, an ambitious objective also reflected in the exceptional recovery plan with an estimated total financial firepower of €1.85 trillion proposed by the EC¹².

But, as always, the European Commission’s projects and financial projections, as the executive branch of the Union, are dependent on national political will and the support both of the EU Council, which represents the Member States’ interests, and of the European Parliament, which has the interests of the European citizens at heart, in order to become reality and produce results. Speaking of the latest European Council in July, dedicated to the massive coronavirus recovery package, **Luxembourg Prime Minister Xavier Bettel said that in his seven years’ experience of European meetings he “had never seen positions as diametrically opposed as this”¹³**. And it is up to the European Council, which represents the highest level of political cooperation between EU countries, to define the general political direction and priorities of the European Union.

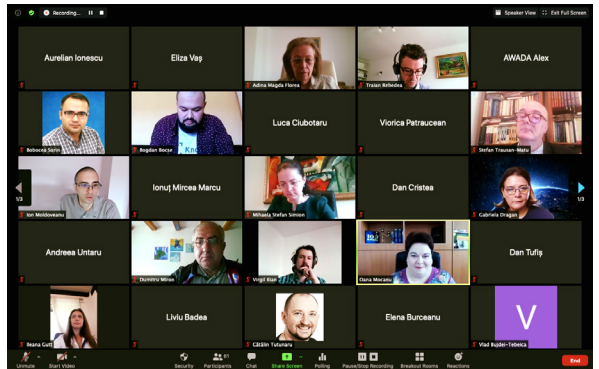
In the end, I would like to mention that today, when the European project seems more endangered than ever in the past decades, a ray of hope can come from the rotating presidency of the Council. **“Europe is capable of achieving great things if we work together and stand together in solidarity”**, said Chancellor Angela Merkel in a plenary session of the European Parliament, presenting the goals of the German Presidency in the coming six months¹⁴. For Germany, often metaphorically described as the ‘economic and political engine of the Union’, European integration and its reinforcement represent not only an irreplaceable peace project for a stable European context, but also a strategic necessity. And, since a smart foreign policy begins at home, I am expecting that the aforementioned aspect will be reflected in the progress of some key files in the Union during the next semester, and also in the way in which Berlin will strike a balance between the Union’s ambitions and its inherent structural limitations.

- ¹ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, *History of 1918 Flu Pandemic*, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-commemoration/1918-pandemic-history.htm>.
- ² Paul Dobrescu and Mălina Ciocea, *Geopolitics in the time of coronavirus*, European Institute of Romania, available at http://ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Opinion_Paul-Dobrescu_Geopolitics-in-the-time-of-coronavirus_EN-1.pdf
- ³ European Commission, *Coronavirus: EU global response to fight the pandemic*, available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_604.
- ⁴ European Council, *European solidarity in action*, available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/coronavirus/european-solidarity-in-action/>.
- ⁵ Umut Ozkirimli, “Coronationalism?”, Open Democracy, available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/coronationalism/>.
- ⁶ Loes Debuysere (ed.), “‘Coronationalism’ vs a geopolitical Europe? EU external solidarity at the time of Covid-19”, European Policy Institutes Network, available at https://epin.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EPIN-REPORT-Coronationalism-versus-Geopolitical-Europe_formatted.pdf.
- ⁷ *Ibidem*.
- ⁸ Among others, US President Donald Trump announced in April that he was halting funding to the World Health Organization and later decided to withdraw his country altogether from the organization starting next year.
- ⁹ European Council, *European solidarity in action*, available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/coronavirus/european-solidarity-in-action/>.
- ¹⁰ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.
- ¹¹ European Commission, *Coronavirus Global Response: €7.4 billion raised for universal access to vaccines*, available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_797.
- ¹² Andrei Mocearov, “Economia politică a Planului de refacere al Comisiei Europene” (*The political economy of the European Commission’s recovery plan*), European Institute of Romania, available in Romanian language at http://ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Articol-de-opinie_Andrei-Mocearov_final.pdf.
- ¹³ Euronews, “EU summit: Leaders meet for fourth day after all-night talks yield no agreement”, available at <https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/20/eu-summit-deadlock-see-talks-stretch-into-sunday>.
- ¹⁴ European Parliament, “Angela Merkel presents German Presidency priorities to the European Parliament”, available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20200706IPR82712/angela-merkel-presents-german-presidency-priorities-to-the-european-parliament>.

event

Five online debates organised within the POCA project

The European Institute of Romania (EIR) has implemented the second stage of the project “Consolidating and promoting Romania’s position as a relevant actor in the decision-making process at the European level” code SIPOCA 400 / code SMIS2014+ 115759, consisting of five online thematic debates with the focus point of discussing the intermediate version of each analysis developed by the teams of authors.



The first debate (26 May 2020) was attended by 50 people, and it was focused on the *role and relevance of impact studies in defining national positions at EU level*. The research team, coordinated by Prof. Iordan Gheorghe Bărbulescu, presented a series of conclusions and recommendations for national positioning in the European context, such as: all EU Member States, except for Romania, aim to use impact studies when secondary law elements (directives/regulations) are transposed into national legislation; only 14 Member States are obliged by internal rules to use impact assessments to substantiate their national positions within the European Union; among the countries that do not substantiate their European positions through impact assessments we see EU founding states such as France, the Netherlands or Belgium.

The second debate (*Ways of deepening the Eastern Partnership for 2020 and beyond*), facilitated by the research team, coordinated by Prof. Mircea Brie, aimed to test the scenarios developed for the evolution of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and to present the conclusions and recommendations arising from the thematic analysis. Thus, 49 participants debated on 4 June 2020 topics such as: Romania should focus on several directions of interest for the EaP, such as security or energy, and on the creation of strategic projects for regional cooperation; greater attention should be paid to Romania’s trade connections with the EaP states; a framework should be created for civil society, Romanian citizens and cultural agents to engage in good neighbourly relations with EaP partners.

The third debate (*Artificial intelligence - the impact at the EU level on the productivity of the companies and on the labour market (Case-study: Romania)*) brought together 70 participants and took place on 5 June 2020. The debate was facilitated by the research team, coordinated by Prof. Adina Florea, and the main ideas submitted concerned: AI will have a significant economic impact: by 2035, AI could double the annual rates of global economic growth; at the European Union level there is an increasing pressure to act quickly to bridge the gap with the US, China or Japan;

Romania can become competitive in the field of AI by supporting research and innovation for the development of the next generation of technologies in AI and by supporting public-private partnership in the adoption of AI solutions.

The fourth debate (*The simplification of the cohesion policy for post-2020 period: possible solutions for streamlining the implementation*), organised on 10 June, was facilitated by the research team, coordinated by Prof. **Dumitru Miron**, and had a total of 67 participants. The event highlighted the following types of arguments in favour of simplifying the cohesion policy for the next financial framework 2021-2027: the formulation of clearer rules for which interpretation is uniform; enhancing cooperation between managing and audit authorities; ensuring consistency of rules on accessing and implementing the various EU instruments; reducing regulatory differences outside the cohesion policy sphere.

The last debate (*The impact of digitisation on the architecture and implementation of the European policies designed to strengthening the internal market*) took place on 11 June and was facilitated by the research team, coordinated by Prof. **Adrian Curaj**. The event brought together 59 participants from across the country and aimed to discuss the problems that characterise the digitalisation processes at European and national level and to analyse the policy proposals submitted by the authors. Thus, the areas for which recommendations have been addressed are those related to cybersecurity competence centres, digital taxation, implementation of existing directives, e-Privacy, Digital Services Act and cloud computing.

Following the debates and considering the suggestions received, the teams of researchers will work on the final version of the thematic analysis, which will then be integrated in the draft public policy on European affairs, developed by the project leader (Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Eliza Vaş
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Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union

The German Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in a trio with Portugal and Slovenia, began on 1 July 2020 in a very complex context, mainly generated by the novel coronavirus pandemic, coupled with high expectations from Member States¹. Building on the motto *Together for Europe's recovery*, the German Presidency's programme is a very ambitious one, focusing on six main priorities: overcoming the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic permanently, as well as the economic and social recovery; a stronger and more innovative Europe; a fair Europe; a sustainable Europe; a Europe of security and common values; a strong Europe in the world².



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Concerning the health crisis and its economic fallout, the German Presidency aims to support the efforts to contain the spread of the virus, as well as to propose a sustainable programme of economic and social recovery, investing in the European innovative potential and strengthening the social cohesion of the EU. In this regard, the fast conclusion of the negotiations regarding the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 remains a key element, taking into account that the next MFF must include both short term objectives and mechanics, in order to tackle the health crisis, but also long term perspectives, in order to strengthen the Union in a dynamic global environment.

What is more, the agreement on the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is expected to be finalized during the German Presidency. Germany will assist the European Commission's efforts in the negotiation process, in order to achieve a partnership fulfilling the *Political Declaration setting out the framework for the future relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom*, as well as safeguarding the close connections between the two partners.

As the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Bogdan Aurescu underlined during the launching event for the German Presidency, on 3 July, Romania supports these ambitious objectives, as they reflect very well the spirit of European unity and solidarity³. In the past, crises represented moments of critical reflection for the European Union, opportunities to become stronger and better prepared to face challenges. Focusing on the major transformations that Member States have to tackle together, such as climate change or digitalization, the common objective is to find solutions on the medium and long term, in order to strengthen and infuse sustainability to the European project.

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¹ For more information on the topic, see the EPIN Report, "Member states' expectations towards the German Council Presidency", available at <http://ier.gov.ro/en/news/epin-report-member-states-expectations-towards-the-german-council-presidency/>.

² The full programme can be accessed at <https://www.eu2020.de/blob/2360248/e0312c50f910931819ab67f630d15b2f/pdf-programm-en-data.pdf>.

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press release, *Minister of Foreign Affairs Bogdan Aurescu Attends the Opening Event of the German Presidency of the Council of the EU*, available at <http://www.mae.ro/en/node/53092>.

Online debate: minimum wage and the consumer basket for a decent living standard

On 29 June 2020, the European Institute of Romania (EIR), in partnership with Euractiv Network, organised an online debate on the “Minimum wage and the consumer basket for a decent standard of living”. The event was done under the project “*Network of EUROFOUND Correspondents: Romania*”, financed by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EUROFOUND) between 2018 - 2022.

In the opening statement, Oana Mocanu, Director General of EIR, presented the EUROFOUND project and underlined the importance of the topic discussed. She also mentioned the publication of the “Minimum wage report” by EUROFOUND. The debate was facilitated by Nicoleta Voicu, Junior Researcher, Euractiv Network.

The speakers’ interventions highlighted the following key aspects:

- The European context of the debates on a fair minimum wage for European workers is based on: the European Pillar of Social Rights (Chapter II, Fair working conditions, the sixth principle - Wages); a possible proposal by the Commission of a legal instrument that will guarantee that each European worker benefits of a fair minimum wage and the October 2019 Resolution of the European Parliament on active employment policies;
- January 2020 was marked by the first step in the Commission’s consultation with social partners at EU level. The objective of the consultation was to collect social partners’ opinions about an EU action that would protect each European worker by a fair minimum wage;
- There is a law adopted by the Romanian Parliament stipulating that the minimum wage in Romania is set according to a consumer basket. The minimum wage also takes into consideration work productivity and the inflation rate;
- There is a connection between the minimum wage and the percentage of young people living in the same household with their parents - the overcrowding rate of Romanian households;
- There is a need to update the minimum consumer basket for a decent living in Romania because the old law did not contain certain costs associated with communication (Internet and other);
- According to the 2018 data, 85% of the active employment contracts in Romania are paid a gross salary lower than RON 4 400 which is insufficient for a decent living in line with the consumer basket;
- The draft law on the consumer basket was a result of the campaign “For decent life and work”, run in cooperation with social partners;
- Employers support an adjusted and fairly set minimum wage that allows a better representation of employees’ interests;
- Any increase in the minimum wage generates economic effects that do not distribute evenly. The purpose of any increase in the wage is to facilitate a better living standard for employees;
- In Romania, the biggest increase in the minimum wage happened in 2004: 43%;
- After 2004, when Romania entered a much bigger labour market and Romanian workers were able to work anywhere in the EU, the country experienced a massive loss of workforce;
- It is difficult to state that the current minimum wage is adequate when, after 35 years of work, the pension rights of a worker on minimum wage are less than the social pension;
- Capital holders should invest in the human capital the same way they do in technology.

The video recording of the event and other materials can be found on [EIR's website](#).

Tiberiu Nica
Projects Unit

Teleworking and the digitalisation of employment relationship in the context of COVID-19

On 9 July 2020, the European Institute of Romania (EIR), in partnership with Euractiv Network, organised an online debate on “Teleworking and the digitalisation of employment relationship in the context of COVID-19”. The event was part of the project “*Network of EUROFOUND Correspondents: Romania*”, financed by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EUROFOUND) between 2018 - 2022.

In the opening statement, Livia Mirescu, EIR expert and coordinator of the EUROFOUND project, presented the importance of the topic discussed, mentioning that the event would also tackle the digitalisation of enterprises and the role of the European institutions in terms of funding. The debate was facilitated by Iulian Oneaşcă, EIR Expert.

The speakers’ interventions highlighted the following key aspects:

- The topic of the debate brings forward the effects of two important notions for the progress of society: entrepreneurship - giving rise to teleworking, and technology - enabling work even during a pandemic;
- Technology, when compared with science, has at its core the principle of truth. This criterion reveals if the product works or not and if it’s cost effective in market conditions;
- There is a diversity of digital workers and of employment relationships with the entities they work for;
- Successfully balancing professional and personal life is becoming increasingly difficult. The digital worker is expected to be available on an ongoing basis;
- There are three categories of workers: the ones that have the liberty and training needed to support their interests and work online, those that are unable to work digitally and the ones who lack access to digital resources;

- Traditionally, workers were debtors of an obligation of means as they had to perform according to their professional training and skills, during the daily working hours. Nowadays, they are turning into debtors of an obligation of results, their profile getting closer to that of a freelancer, but without enjoying the latter's rights;
- Teleworking impacts both the employer and the employee. For the employee - autonomy, social distancing, lack of predictability, online presenteeism - even if the worker is ill, he/she can still carry out the tasks stipulated in his/her employment contract. For the employer - productivity, lowering costs, data security risk, flexibility, training costs;
- The possibility that the work place might be defined in the employment contract as a geographical area was also discussed;
- Electronic signature - there is a current need for a worker to sign the employment contract in his own handwriting; it should be much easier to identify employees for digital signatures, maybe by means of a video session;
- The social and economic developments demand a relaxation of the employment relations. Legislation should be adapted to the new realities. Flexibility is not only achieved through teleworking, but also through the regulation of work activities on digital platforms;
- Workplace - if the law does not provide a clear definition of the workplace, then we must use the general one. The provision that the workplace should be defined as a geographical area would not ensure work safety and security for the worker;
- Romania is currently transposing the Directive 1153 on transparent and predictable working conditions - it gives Member States the possibility to establish new types of employment contracts. Member States are bound that certain information concerning the workplace be given in writing to the employee (not necessarily on paper, it can also be electronically);
- We are in a process of transition to the 4th Industrial Revolution - 1/3 of companies are currently evaluating their digitalisation level, aiming for a target of 70% in the next five years. The transition process is based on digitalising all assets and processes, as well as on integration in digital ecosystems;
- A convergent model for employment relationships should be promoted at EU level, taking into account the Single Market and the freedom to work in any EU country.

The video recording of the event and other materials can be found on [EIR's website](#).

Tiberiu Nica
Projects Unit

New section on human rights available on EIR's website

On the basis of the bilateral cooperation protocol signed in February 2020 between the European Institute of Romania (EIR) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Translation Coordination Unit (TCU) carries out the translation and revision of certain documents necessary for the fulfilment of obligations undertaken by Romania as a member of the United Nations (UN) and as party to the fundamental conventional instruments adopted within it.

The TCU has the pleasure to announce the publication on EIR's website of the documents translated and revised on the basis of the aforementioned protocol. These can be accessed free of charge on the Institute's website, under the "[Human rights](#)" section, in the new "UN monitoring mechanisms" submenu.

Those interested are invited to consult:

- [UPR of Romania \(3rd Cycle - 29th session\). Thematic list of recommendations;](#)
- [Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. Romania \(extract\);](#)
- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Human Rights Committee. Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Romania;](#)
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child. Committee on the Rights of the Child. Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Romania;](#)
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Concluding observations on the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports of Romania.](#)

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* The texts published in this Newsletter express the authors' opinion and do not represent the official position of the European Institute of Romania.

ISSN 2065 - 457X

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