

A European Parliament without a People

I worked 7 years in the European Commission and served as MEP in the previous legislature. I applaud the book issued by Mr Modi who is also familiar with the EU Institutions. He knows the inner workings and indicates where it is heading for. A system 'out of balance' only generates imbalances pushing the entire project off the cliff.

To my experience, European integration can only be successful when it respects a balance between 'diversity and uniformity'. The balance produces its own value: 'legitimacy' among the peoples of Europe.

Since Brexit, European Institutions channel all pressure towards 'uniformity'. European Institutions attempt to install 'European centralism' and the European Parliament is leading the charge. It demands 'more Europe' in all policy areas and it puts European micro-management above sovereignty of nations.

European centralism will inevitably demand 'unity of thinking', or in French 'Pensee Unique'. Criticism will be rejected out of hand, as 'anti-European' or 'populist'.

Among the peoples of Europe there are three existential worries.

1. 'Excessive immigration' which citizens fear as a threat to their social and economic existence.
2. 'Failed integration' of newcomers which fuels fear for cultures that do not integrate and rather create parallel societies.

3. Finally, 'European centralism' which in many nation states is regarded as a threat to their national identity.

These factor, whether you like it or not, are the driving forces of voter behaviour. As we have seen in Austria, these worries move from the far right to the political centre.

The European Parliament should reflect these worries. But it doesn't. The Parliament is too large, too expensive and too unrepresentative. The German Constitutional Court qualified in one of its rulings the European Parliament as a 'Parliament in Europe'; not the 'Parliament of Europe'.

The leading political families in Europe – the Christian Democrats, the Socialists and the EU Liberals – send people to the European Parliament to represent the 'political elites of member states': calling themselves the 'pro European majority'.

The divide between elites and citizens is growing. The European Parliament supported the European Constitution with a huge majority. So did political elites in member states. But in France and The Netherlands, voters rejected the constitution in referenda. As more referenda loomed, the ratification process was quickly aborted because an avalanche of 'No' was in sight.

As the European Parliament will push for more 'European centralism', the mounting pressure will rip the EU open at the seams. Some nation states will revolt. For 2019, I foresee the 'Balkanisation' of the European Parliament. As 'reform from the inside' – which I have always supported – is now out of sight, the sledgehammer will come from the outside.

I am a strong supporter of European co-operation. As a young journalist my first big interview was 'Jacques Delors', then President of the European Commission. He qualified, the then European Community, as the art of the possible: a balancing act.

However, Brexit - very regrettable from a continental point of view - has severe consequences. It breaks the 'balance of power' within Europe, which balanced power relations over the past 300 years. No nation succeeded in dominating the European continent at the expense of all others.

Europe after Brexit will install the 'dominating power' on the Continent in the Axis Germany France; itself being a relationship not free of sensitivities. Furthermore, EU Institutions will start a 'process of self-mandating' to speak on behalf of Europe. The euro, the common currency, is not just a currency but the driving tool to force more uniformity.

As Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, spoke at the previous session here in Strasbourg outlining a centralist Europe, he was widely applauded by the 'pro European majority' of this Parliament.

In fact, the European Central Bank (ECB) is a perfect example of 'self mandating' through unorthodox monetary policy. In a meeting with ECB President Mario Draghi I once called him the 'James Bond of the monetary world'. Because: 'James Bond has a licence to kill and you Mr Draghi claim a licence to print'. He wasn't amused.

Look at statements of Mr Juncker showing clear signs of 'double standards'. Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary are continuously reprimanded because they do not

want to receive the migrants which Germany try to force upon them. The Commission launches infringement procedures and proliferates threats all over the place, in the name of 'EU law'. But when France fails its budgetary criteria for 14 consecutive years, nothing happens.

For Juncker Scotland is welcome as a new EU-member; but Catalunya is not. Apparently, the sovereignty of nations is enshrined in Mr Juncker. He then stated that he doesn't want a EU 'with 98 mini-states'. If that is the rule he'd better dissolve the state of Luxembourg first, with its 350.000 inhabitants. Luxembourg could join France, as Germany is already too big. France could impose some additional taxation on Luxembourg. I am sure they like it.

Therefore, the maximum attainable level of European co-operation is a 'Confederation of Nations', pooling sovereignty in a limited number of policy areas ensuring proper regulation and implementation. Additional areas would be open to 'coalitions of the willing', like in defence. Policy areas that are inherent to nation states should stay there, or return in case they are already in the realm of the EU.

Would there be any place for a Parliament in a European Confederacy? I think so, because every form of government needs scrutiny. But it should be smaller, focused and more effective than the current European Parliament.

- Its size should be reduced from 751 to 550: about the size of the US Congress. The slogan should be less but better.
- In its composition the Parliament of a European Confederacy could partly consist of members of national parliaments as to assure a working relationship between the two.

- The European Parliament should focus on its 'hardcore competences', like budget control and legislation in the competent committees, rather than travel around the world in the Foreign Affairs Committee. Currently, the latter containing over 150 MEPs while the Budget Control Committee hardly finds MEPs willing to get familiar with the EU-budget.
- It should also limit its activities and avoid unwieldy structures like the vast number of 'delegations' with parliaments outside the EU, 'Inter Groups' on all sorts of issues like wine and spirits, and an excessive number of political group meetings outside its Brussels premises.
- The Parliament should also reduce its number of buildings, currently around 40, and preferably have one single seat. The costs of the European Parliament amount to about 2 billion euro annually. A Parliament of a European Confederacy will be limited in scope, cheaper in price tag and more effective in core legislation.

These proposals do not attract popularity in the corridors of this Parliament. We are here in Strasbourg, in the middle of the 'European bubble of believers'. Professor Kerber issued a book of mine with the title: 'The Tower of Babel is in Brussels'. That is what we see now. Europe needs 'Reformers' asking difficult questions. The reformer will be accused of heresy, depicted as a 'nonbeliever' at the Tower. But in the end the law of gravity will prove his point.