State of the debate on the future of Europe

2018/2094(INI) - 13/02/2019 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 407 votes to 196 with 41 abstentions a resolution on the state of the debate on the future of Europe.

Strengthening cooperation and solidarity

Members recalled that the European Union is an example of supranational integration without equal and has brought lasting peace, prosperity and welfare ever since the Schuman declaration of 9 May 1950: common security, respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights have been at the core of it aspirations.

However, over the past few years the Union has faced multiple crises which have tested its resilience and capacity to act in a decisive and united manner. The UK's referendum of June 2016 leading to its notification on 29 March 2017 of its intention to leave the European Union has intensified the debate on the future of the Union. The negotiations on the envisaged withdrawal of the UK from the EU have revealed the high level of interdependence of the Member States, the degree to which we all rely on joint instruments and policies and the costs of any departure.

In view of the multiple internal and external current and future challenges facing the Union, Parliament called on the EU to promote a renewed spirit of cooperation and solidarity among its Members based on the Treaty of the European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, while the objective enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe should continue to inspire the actions taken by the Union to further strengthen European integration.

Facing common challenges

The heads of state or government who addressed Parliament in plenary during the debates on the future of Europe all acknowledged that there is a need to face the challenges of the future together and to do better what can only be achieved together. Members reiterated that differentiated integration must remain open to all Member States and continue to act as a method of deeper European integration and solidarity, which should not be confused with the idea of a Europe à la carte.

Stressing that the crisis has produced an imbalance between the main institutions of the Union to the benefit of the European Council, Members affirmed that the Community method is best suited for the functioning of the Union. They advocated, with regard to decision-making procedures, the principle of qualified majority voting in the Council and, for legislation, the use of the ordinary legislative procedure in all areas where this is possible.

They reiterated their suggestion to transform the Council into a true legislative chamber on equal footing with Parliament, building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty, and to improve the transparency of its decision-making process. Members recalled their proposal according to which, in the event of a possible future revision of the Treaties, the right of legislative initiative could also be attributed to Parliament as the direct representative of EU citizens.

Priorities

Parliament regretted the non-binding character of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which cannot, therefore, reorient the Union's focus on economic policies, the internal market and budgetary policies towards social policy objectives.

In the debate on the future of Europe, Members stressed the importance of:

- ensuring upward economic and social convergence in the European Semester process;

- integrating the objective of environmental protection into all EU policies and measures;

- continuing the process of deepening and completing the EMU in order to contribute to preserving the stability of the single currency and enhancing the convergence of economic, fiscal and labour market policies and social standards among the Member States;

- strong political commitment, effective governance and democratic accountability at European and national level, and in particular parliamentary scrutiny at different stages of the European Semester by the European Parliament and national parliaments;

- continued commitment to the completion of the banking union;

- identifying and removing barriers to the internal market, as well as ensuring the protection of citizens and completing the union of capital markets;

- continuing the full review of existing VAT legislation;

- recognising the importance of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) supported by a well-financed budget;

- considering how to reform the Union's budgetary system in order to provide an adequate budget to guarantee the financing of the planned policies.

Migration policy

The resolution deplored the absence of an agreement among the Member States on the priorities and implementation of an EU-level comprehensive immigration policy, which would make it possible to organise and regulate migratory flows, control the EU’s external borders more effectively, cooperate with countries of origin and transit, and guarantee respect for the fundamental rights of migrants and asylum seekers. Members underlined that the obvious contradictions in interests exposed by Member States, as well as the discontent voiced by citizens, need to be overcome in order not to jeopardise the European integration project, which suffers as a direct result of an instrumentalisation of the migration issue by the Eurosceptic parties.

Defence

Parliament recalled its call for the establishment of a permanent Council of Defence Ministers chaired by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR). It underlined the importance of appropriate democratic accountability of decisions taken in this area and the need for reinforced cooperation between the European Parliament and national parliaments in this regard.

Trade policy

Stressing that the common commercial policy should remain a fundamental pillar of the Union's external policy, Members called on the EU to take the lead on the world’s trade policy at multilateral and bilateral level, and lead the defence of an open, rules-based, fair and sustainable development-oriented global trading system.

Respect for the Union's values

Parliament stressed that neither national sovereignty nor subsidiarity can justify or legitimise the systematic refusal of a Member State from the fundamental values of the European Union. It asked the Commission once again to swiftly submit a proposal giving effect to its resolution of 25 October 2016 with recommendations to the Commission on the establishment of an EU mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.