

УДК 94/99

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THE EUROPEAN UNION AND UKRAINE: A COOPERATION FOR PEACE?

This publication presents the text of Birgit Daiber key-note lecture (within Campus-Programme, FMA Brussels) for the International Scientific Conference «Teaching and Learning EU: Challenges for Ukraine», Chernihiv (Ukraine), May 23-24, 2024.

I feel honored to be able to participate in this seminar. What courage it takes to imagine a future of peace and cooperation under a hail of bombs and destruction! I see before my inner eye still the wonderful cities of Ukraine, which I visited four times as an OSCE election observer. And I cry when I see all the pictures of destruction.

Let's talk about Europe and it's history

At the end of the Second World War and thus at the end of Nazi rule over Europe, there were many proposals for a political unification of Europe from different countries that had experienced that they were too weak as nation states to protect their citizens against the Nazis. The aim was to found a politically united Europe as space for peace and freedom. For hundreds and hundreds of years Europe had been the battlefield of endless wars and conflicts – this should come to an end.

But shortly after 1945, however, the Cold War between West and East began and the national states returned to their national positions.

And so it was initially the Council of Europe (CoE), which did not claim its own legislative power, that could be founded. Even without legislative power the Council of Europe is decisive for the development of human rights and values. CoE is founder of the European Convention of Human Rights (1950) (which is followed by the European Union too) and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (1959). Ukraine is member of the council of Europe since 1995. Actually the Council has 46 Member States. By the way: On March 15 2022 Russia was excluded from the Council of Europe because of the aggression against Ukraine – but just before the vote in the plenary Russia informed the general secretary, that it is cancelling it's participation in CoE and in the European Convention of Human Rights too. Don't let us underestimate the importance of the Council of Europe for our societies.

But now some words on the history of the European Union.

The fathers and mothers of political unification didn't give up the idea of a politically united Europe and decided to pursue the path of economic unification first in the hope that political unification would come at some point. This was the moment in 1951 when the European Coal and Steel Community, Europe's most important industrial goods at the time, was founded. Alongside France, Benelux and Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany was also invited to join just six years after the disaster of Nazi rule. The fathers and mothers of European unification learnt the lessons of the two world wars and did not want to let West Germany get caught between the fronts of the Cold War and, moreover, integration into the European Coal and Steel Community offered the opportunity to bring the West German coal and steel industry under control.

This was followed by the foundation of the European Economic Communities in 1957 with the Treaty of Rome.

There were ups and downs in the EEC for a long time until the act for direct elections to the European Parliament was passed by the member states in 1976 and the first direct elections took place in 1979. The development of the European Parliament and the increase in power up to the present day, when the Parliament is a co-decision-making body in most policy areas, was also complicated and took a long time. A decisive step in the economic integration was the Single Act adopted in 1986, which defined the four great freedoms of the European Community: the free movement of capital, goods, services and persons. It was not until the Maastricht Treaty came into force in 1992 that the European political union was established; since then it has been called the European Union and no longer the European Community. However, in this treaty the Union still remained a shell without much content. The renewed discussion about democratization of the Union then began. This was not only about strengthening the European Parliament and its powers, but also about the question of a constitution for the European Union. As a first step, the Declaration of Fundamental Rights of Citizens was drawn up.

Then, in 2001, a convention was convened in which all the main political levels in the EU were represented. They drew up a complex constitution, which was adopted by the European institutions in 2004 – but then disappeared from the agenda again due to the negative referendums in France and the Netherlands – two founding members of the EU. A new attempt was launched, focusing on the functioning of the Union, with the essential points of the Constitution and the Declaration of Fundamental Rights inserted or appended as parts. This document was in turn adopted by the European institutions as the Lisbon Treaty. Criticism was again voiced: a referendum was held in Ireland, which only produced an acceptable result at the second attempt. And so, at the very last moment, the Lisbon Treaty came into force in December 2009. Today, the European Parliament is involved in deciding EU legislation in the vast majority of political areas.

I would like to stop here and not delve any further into the complexity of the EU's institutional structure. I do not want to bore or even confuse you with my remarks, but I would like to draw your attention to how long and complicated and sometimes disappointing this process of European unification is. The enormous challenge lies in the fact that the nation states surrender some of their fundamental rights to the European Union, but at the same time they are involved in the decisions within the framework of the European Council and that there are also EU institutions that have democratic legitimacy to co-decide or adjudicate, such as the European Court of Justice. It is a unique construction – and it is still a work in progress - the EU is a permanent construction site.

I have been fascinated by this constant struggle to deepen European democracy since the beginning. It was relatively easy to bring economic interests together, because everyone benefits from the common market. It is much more difficult to achieve the political and thus the democratic deepening of the EU. But as it is on all institutional levels: Democracy is the only system that really opens the possibility of transparency, participation and to avoid corruption.

Besides others there are two main differences to the democratic procedures in our countries: the first difference is that the EU cannot be divided into the classic separation of powers between the executive and the legislature, because the executive and the legislature are divided between Parliament and the EU Commission and EU Council. Admittedly, this is very complicated. And it contains a second elementary peculiarity: decisions in the EU are mostly compromises. The ability to compromise is the driving force behind the development of the EU.

If we accept these differences, then we can also understand this other dimension of democracy, which undoubtedly still needs to be developed, but which is not in competition with democracy in our countries, but in an expansion and a new dimension.

It is very difficult to talk about democracy and developments in the EU when Russian bombs are destroying Ukraine, and you have to live in permanent fear. I cannot offer any consolation, but perhaps it is a little helpful to remember the beginnings of the idea of European political unification: it was developed as a peace project by the resistance fighters against Nazi rule at the end of Second World War, and they were in hiding and in prison. Back then, hope in Europe helped them survive the disaster. And perhaps this is it today that the EU is strong: it should make a peaceful and strong contribution to Ukraine's emergence from cellars and win peace.

Now Ukraine is candidate for accession in the EU. And you are already involved in the process of bringing the EU and Ukraine together. It will be a long time before Ukraine can fully adopt the EU's regulatory framework. Just think of the two major sectors of agriculture and the iron and steel industry ... But there are also fields in which the possibilities of cooperation can be tested. Now.

On February 6, 2024, the Council and the Parliament agreed on a proposal to create a new single specific instrument to contribute to Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction. The Ukraine Facility will provide the country with predictable financial support of €50 billion over the period 2024-2027. Directing this so-called «Ukraine Facility» not only to very large infrastructure projects but also to the development of human capital is now a matter of negotiation between the EU and Ukraine.

In addition, there are other possibilities that go beyond Erasmus and the Jean Monnet program.

As an accession country, Ukraine also has the opportunity to participate in EU programs. I would like to mention two of them:

The Interreg program [1]. The various Interreg programs support cooperation between different regions and cities in Europe. The aim of Interreg Europe is the exchange of experience, knowledge and approaches between public actors and authorities in Europe. The focus is on improving programs for regional development.

The Interreg Europe program is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). In the current funding period 2021-2027, the program has funds of 379.3 million euros at its disposal.

Horizon, the EU's 9th Research Framework Program. Horizon Europe aims to build a knowledge- and innovation-based society and a competitive economy while contributing to sustainable development.

In terms of content, the framework program consists of three priorities: «Excellence in Science», «Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness» and «Innovative Europe» [2]. In addition, there is an overarching area for «widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area».

It is definitely worth familiarizing yourself with these programmes and implementing projects together with other European partners. As a university, you have excellent starting conditions here. However, I can say from my previous experience with the organization of transnational projects that it takes a lot of patience and intensive work to familiarize yourself with the formalities of the programmes – but it's worth it.

To come back to the Bologna Process where you already participate through Erasmus and Jean-Monnet.

The European Union's competencies in the field of education are very weak, because education is a national competence. European initiatives must therefore be decided by the national authorities and can then be supported by the EU.

The idea of an area in which education crosses borders in Europe is not new. The idea has played an important role in the field of higher education since 1999. There, 29 European education ministers launched the so-called «Bologna Process». The coordination process, which now encompasses 49 countries, aims to create a European Higher Education Area in which degree courses and qualifications are standardized.

The Bologna Process aims to standardize courses of study and degrees as well as the international mobility of students. The main elements are the introduction of the Bachelor's and Master's degree system and assessment according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). This is intended to ensure the comparability and recognition of qualifications

The European Commission's initiative to create a «European Education Area», which is to be implemented in a first stage by 2025, goes back to a communication from the European Commission in September 2020. In February 2021, the EU education ministers not only took up this concept, but also confirmed that they want to continue working on the European Education Area beyond 2025.

The project aims to create Europe-wide networked education systems with high-quality and inclusive offers for learners and modern employment conditions for teachers. This networking is intended not least to strengthen the common European identity.

This initiative also calls for the innovative strength of researchers and students in Ukraine.

Thank you for your attention!

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ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИЙ СОЮЗ ТА УКРАЇНА: СПІВПРАЦЯ ЗАРАДИ МИРУ?

Дана публікація – текст лекції Біргіт Дайбер, екс-депутата Європейського Парламенту, директора Європейського Офісу Фундації Рози Люксембург у Брюсселі, координатора трансатлантичних та міжнародних проєктів та експерта з соціально-урбаністичного розвитку. Промову було виголошено у рамках роботи міжнародної наукової конференції «Викладання і вивчення ЄС: виклики для України», яка проходила 23-24 травня 2024 р. у м. Чернігові (Україна).

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 13.06.2024