

Is this the First European presidency of Romania, a big step for your nation, can it be considered a point of arrival for a long journey?

Undoubtedly, the rotating presidencies of the Council of the European Union have become a commonplace for many Member States, but for Romania, a country that joined the European Union in 2007, this consists its first presidency. Certainly, these years have been vital for the history of our country. The presidency is definitely a historic period, especially considering the agenda that we are bound to manage, which is a difficult one: Brexit and the budget of the European Union on the post-Brexit era. Unfortunately, the last 30 years after 1989 were not that easy for Romania. Until 2007, we had to overcome a difficult period given the fact that we had objectives like joining the European Union and NATO. We achieved our objectives but not in an easy way, rather than a complicated manner.

Have you experienced the evolution of Romania from the Cold War to the current European presidency how has the world changed in the period, and the hopes you had were realized?

The world has changed very rapidly in this period. The years that succeeded 2007 with the global, economic crises have affected the EU and Romania as well. We had to face phenomena that we have not been accustomed to and for which often we did not have immediate solutions. It has been a difficult journey from communism to capitalism, but the big question that remains and for which I do not think I have an answer is, "What type of capitalism are we moving towards?" Because the state of general well-being in Europe already has a lot of problems, capitalism is becoming more and more chaotic, European citizens are harder and harder to please and all these issues related to the model change and change of the type of policy decision, affected not only Romania and its European course, but I think it has affected the whole Europe. I believe that at this moment we are at a crossroads where each Member State needs to analyze its position in the structure of the Union and think about what needs to be done for the European Union to become more and more democratic towards its citizens to be closer to the citizens and not pursue policies in the interests of the various governments. These are, in my opinion, the main conditions for the EU to have a future.

Currently women in the European parliament are 36.4%, do you think there are still great steps to be taken to achieve true equality between men and women and what intentions should be implemented?

Gender equality is a policy that has lately marked European decisions as well as national decisions. As a liberal, I find it difficult to accept the socialist quota-promoting formulas system and even though I think it is important that more women become involved in decision-making as part of the European Union's political institutions, I still consider that the primary condition must be meritocracy. If we privilege the competition between men and women, we must find exactly those men and those women who are able to serve the interests of those who have elected them, who manage to make their decision-making, and by that, I mean the legislative process in respect to the European Parliament.

Under the leadership of România there will be at least three major problems to be addressed, the Brexit, the European elections, the long-term budget 2021-2027, a particularly challenging protocol awaits you, what are your forecasts?

There are three major problems to be tackled under this Romanian presidency of the European Council, and they seem to be the most difficult problems the EU had to deal with for the past twenty years. By far the most complicated problem of all is Brexit: for the first time, a country decides to leave the European Union. This represents a vulnerability in the EU. The current context in which a

country will leave the EU without an agreement can cause many behavioral problems for the European Union as well as for Great Britain. We cannot know exactly what the economic, social and political impact for the European Union will be nor for the Brits and I surely hope that the Brexit lesson will not be regarded as a "business as usual" situation.

We, the ones who have chosen to continue in the EU, should try to draw a conclusion from this bitter lesson in front of which we find ourselves today. We need to see if Brussels' bureaucracy, Brussels' decision-making, has somehow provoked the lack of confidence of European citizens. Brexit for me is the proof that British citizens could not find their aspirations within the EU community.

In this context, the upcoming European elections will be a strong signal, because, if we consider the rate of participation in the last two polls, the elections have not always been attractive to European citizens and I think this time they should mark their voices heard more, by voting, in order to balance results from member states with a rather negative or euro-sceptic opinion towards the European Union. Moreover, I think that we need to rethink the functioning of certain institutions and, in particular, of the European Commission which, in my opinion, must implement the political decisions of the Council and the Parliament, and make less politics. The behavior of the last European Commission resulted in elements that have far removed or diminished the credibility share of this institution.

You are an expert on justice, which is one of the squid of the European community, do you believe that we will have to arrive at a uniform justice system throughout the European community?

The European justice system has been a dispute between the Member States, despite the two decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg in the '60s, when the priority of European law over national law was established. It is what we, jurists, call the direct effect of European legislation on domestic law. Nevertheless, we are in a process of constitutionalizing the treaties, which, in principle, can be considered to contravene the constitutions of our national states. I believe in the recent years the European law has been trying to impose a hegemony of vision on some institutions, a hegemony that does not have positive effects and can create elements of dispute.

I want to highlight some aspects on this issue, namely the conditionality of access to European funds depending on the existence of the rule of law, a notion that has no common definition nor common application criteria in European law and which can be misused against some states that recently were under scrutiny. Another example is the matter of the nomination of the European Public Prosecutor. The procedure for this nomination is a non-transparent, controversial one that has changed over the period of its implementation, which has created frustration in many Member States including Italy and is likely to generate distrust in this institution.

In fact, the Luxembourg Civil Service Tribunal is the only court that can rule on the legality of this matter. If we all come to agree that the right is the expression of everyone's will in agreement with the constitutions of the Member States, the effects of legal decisions may be positive. When the rule of law is the expression of the interest of one or some of the Member States, it can generate frustration and this affects the cohesion of the European Union, exactly the situation we are facing today.

In a famous 2009 decision on the interpretation of the Treaty of Lisbon, the German Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe chose to defend Germany's national sovereignty and reminded that the European Union was negotiated on the basis of international treaties and that these procedures should be according to this principle and not the one of international organizations. This is why I believe that

at least in the following months we cannot speak in the European Union about the concept of a common law in the field of justice.

The next steps for România should be entry into the schengen area and into the eurozone, Europe has asked for further progress on issues such as justice, do you have a roadmap to pursue these two objectives?

Unfortunately, the Schengen treaty is currently not respected in the European Union. It is a tremendously technical treaty without political conditions, which has generated a great deal of frustration for citizens from the East, including my country. Failure to comply with the Schengen Treaty and the introduction of conditional policies is a clear example of non-observance of the treaty that is tolerated due to the interests of some Member States. Of course, I think that it is important for Romania and Bulgaria to join the Schengen, we are the Eastern border of the Union and in the conditions of a migratory wave, our behavior to protect the borders of the Union is vital for the entire Union. However, Germany has chosen to deal with Turkey and they almost negotiated an agreement to stop migratory flows, which in my opinion is not a solution at all. Let's not forget that the Union faced with a public debt crisis and although the European Central Bank is the one that oversees the Union's banking principles, the solutions and effects of these crises have important consequences on the political future of the Union. The example of Greece was the first sign that the monetary union did not have enough mechanisms to cope with this situation. Furthermore, I believe that the euro area is a space that needs to be sustained not only by the political will of some Member States but also by an economic reality that converges in all the member countries of the eurozone. Let us all recall the proposal for a eurozone finance minister, even a common parliament, a proposal which was quickly rejected by the large Member States. I think Romania must enter the eurozone when it will be well prepared, when the Romanian economy will have a substantial growth, and when the social structure of our country will be strengthened by the existence of a real middle class. It is not just a simple decision. Romania will have to evaluate its interest and strive not to remain a peripheral economy but a viable economy that would allow us to play a role within the eurozone and not just be the necessary decor of other types of interests.

With the increase in world tensions following the election of president trump, with disagreements and discussions between big states like Russia , USA and China , what role can a united Europe have ?

President Trump is the first American leader who unsettled the stereotypical behavior of American political leaders for more than 30 years. President Trump whom some consider to be a populist promotes fiercely the national interests, and his internationalism is strongly appreciated by his supporters who believe taking care of the American people interests is not something you can reproach to a political leader. Sure, there are internationally negotiated arrangements that the US denounced, even some that can have important consequences for the European Union, and by that, I mean especially the Paris Agreement, but also the agreement with Iran on the more recent nuclear component denunciation by the United States and Russia of the Interim Missile Treaty. All of these can generate disputes and even insecurity in the European space.

Russia, the United States and China are major players in the international arena, and I dare to say China, due to their peculiar development of the economy that tends to become sometimes the main player in the world. I think tensions between these powers are very hard to conciliate in the context of aligning the interests of the EU with the interests of these specific states, and this has become more and more visible in the public dispute between European leaders, the United States, Russia and China.

Looking beyond this reality it is important for each state to consolidate its economy, this being a main condition of a social Europe. One cannot demand a better living level, cannot achieve the realization of principles of equality and equity among citizens as long as a state is unable to provide them, so I believe it is important to act in order to strengthen the national interests. I do not think, for instance, that Italy should not conclude bilateral trade agreements with other states if its interests are in the benefit of Italian citizens. It is very difficult at this point to assess what will be the consequence of these tensions generated by repeated crises and especially by the economic ones. Let's hope that there we will only face conflicts about promoting our respective interests rather than conflicts concerning global peace.

Where should Europe improve to increase citizens perception and cohesion in the community spirit?

There is a lot of discussion about the need to democratize the European Institutions. Undoubtedly, both the Parliament and the Council, which have legislative power, must find solutions for a faster procedure on adopting more transparent legislation that is aligned with citizens' interests. We should not forget that this European construction has been made for its citizens. If Europe wants to exist, it has to remain a citizens' Europe and not only the result of the dialogue between governments. Citizens' voices are expressed through vote, through their political choices in each Member State. This must be respected especially by the European Union, I believe that the European Parliament should have a bigger of legislative initiatives in comparison to the European Commission since the voters have made their choice of representatives. Many politicians remember the interests of their people, the obligation to consult them, unfortunately only during the electoral campaigns and this represents a vulnerability for an organization of which we all choose to be part of. However, our choices and the choices of the European citizens are conditional and based on the respect with which we treat each Member State and every government of the Member States.

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