

## **How to keep the wind in the EU's sails?**

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Ever since 2009, it has been a rough ride for the European Union, as there has been a crisis, after a crisis, after a crisis. The three most significant issues that the European Union has needed to tackle lately have been initially the debt crisis, that had to do with Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Portugal and Ireland. The second wave of difficult issues for the European Union to solve was the migrant crisis that suddenly blew up in 2015. then, the newest difficulty for the unity of the European Union has been Brexit, which comes from the words "Britain" and "Exit", which is the currently ongoing process of Britain leaving the European Union, dropping the number of EU Member States from 28 to 27.

It might be a bit early for anyone to say that the European Union has managed to overcome any single one of these problems already, as not a single one of the above mentioned crisis have yet reached their final resolution, thus allowing to talk about them as a more difficult era in the history of the European Union, as if the events would be counted as history already.

Though, if the European Union wants to continue as the economically prosperous and politically peaceful part of world that it has this far been (Troitiño, 2008), the above mentioned issues require a lot of thought and attention and several of the previously existing EU policies will need to be revised for a brighter tomorrow in co-operation between the Member States, and the European Union governance. Additionally it is to be noted, if we now would manage to dodge the bullet here, it doesn't mean, that in the future there would not happen even worse financial crashes due to any possible reason, or the there would not be an even more powerful flood of people in search for safety or better life, from either the South or from the East, and there is no way to know, if the United Kingdom will stay as the only European Union Member State to ever will hold a public referendum about remaining or leaving the European Union, in the current day turmoil of newfound nationalist movements that however, have already existed for a long time in the background.

### **2. What has happened?**

#### **2.1. Debt crisis**

When it comes to the debt crisis, which could be described to be the first of the dominos to fall in this sequence: in 2009 it turned out that several Southern European countries and Ireland were not able to pay their public debt back in agreed schedules or sums. This led to the other Eurozone states, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank to take action to help those financially troubled states, by making them a plan to overcome the crisis. This included among other things some Eurozone states giving the troubled Member States loans with favorable conditions to keep the countries up (Hamulak, 2016). The European Central Bank tried to help by dropping its interest margins step by the step to the approximate current -0,10% which is historical in the sense, that never before had the interest rate been dropped negative in order to help the economy to come over the bad times.

The Member States of the European Union agreed, that to help the countries in financial troubles, (Portugal, Greece, Spain, Cyprus and Ireland) a legal instrument called "European Financial Stability Facility", EFSF for short, would be established, and that EFSF would be able to issue bonds and other debt instruments in order to be able to collect enough money through those, to be loaned to the struggling Member States, as well as to buy the debt of those countries and to give their banks more capital so that they would not crash (Morawa, 2016).

The ideas that have been proposed for solving the euro crisis have included founding a fiscal union, turning EFSF into EMF - European Monetary Fund that would back bonds in the same way they do in the Us, so it would be safer for the investors and encourage people to invest in those bonds. Also "Eurobonds" have been suggested. Eurobonds were pretty much shot down rather fast, because of the thought, that it would not be fair for countries that have managed their finances well, to collectively have to pay money to loan to the countries that have not been as rigid with their budgeting. One among several options that were discussed, was also just

writing off the debts of the countries that couldn't manage them, and in that way the problem would be handled the fastest<sup>1</sup>.

## 2.2. Migrant crisis

The second big crisis that the European Union has faced lately has been the migrant crisis. The migrant crisis probably got its starting kick in Arab spring that happened in 2010, and after that country by country the old governments were overthrown, and many of the countries were driven to civil wars, and the situation in several countries in the region turned unstable, that was very different to what it had been earlier. Currently for example The International Committee of the Red Cross is carrying out a big operation in Libya to help the war torn country<sup>2</sup>. From these instabilities in the North African and Middle-Eastern region has risen also ISIS<sup>3,4,5</sup>, the radical Islamic organization that is trying to establish its own Islamic Caliphate in Syria, and the ICRC is also trying to help the civilians who are on the way of the ongoing armed conflict in Syria as well<sup>6</sup>.

In 2014 migrants started coming to European Union borders, at that point mainly to Italy from Libya, because the state of Italy was using their own boats to rescue the people from the sea, in an operation called La Mare Nostrum<sup>7</sup>. Soon Italy discovered that as thorough operation that they had been maintaining, would cost a lot in the long run, and they could not fund the operation to the same magnitude alone. This resulted in the EU backed Operation Triton. In 2015 people started arriving through Greece, and many of them aimed to travel all the way through to Northern Europe, such as Germany or Sweden (Nyman-Metcalf, 2010).

The problem with this flow of migrants, was that the migrants arrived for myriad of reasons, many because of the unstable political situation in their area to escape the war, but also many arrived for economic reasons from countries where the employment prospects are low compared to the European Union. As European Union to the most part is still recovering from the euro crisis, and in many countries the employment situation was not great even their original populations, and thus people were not too welcoming. Also because the sequence of events was so sudden, EU Member States were not prepared to receive such many people at once and to give them all food and shelter that they needed. When it came to the asylum seekers, there was not in place enough capacity to process all the cases in goal times. Also the issue with those people who have been refused asylum, is how to return them to their home countries, because that costs money and many of the refused asylum seekers cannot afford their way back themselves.

From the legal point of view, there exists Dublin regulation<sup>8</sup>, according to which the first EU Member State that the asylum seeker has entered, where their finger prints have been taken, will be responsible for the asylum seekers. In theory the idea is smart, as the underlying thought is to prevent "asylum shopping" by going to countries with better welfare benefits for economical reasons, but the regulation has also been harshly criticized, as it drives the southern European countries to which the asylum seekers first arrive to be responsible for the whole deal, and the countries that are benefitting from this, are not participating to the burden of handling the matter equally (Fischer, 2011). There has been a proposal to share the asylum seekers evenly among EU states, but for the moment it is still just on a level of a proposal, and is not yet enforceable.

As solutions for the migrant crisis, or as ways to improve the current situation, there have been a call for deeper co-operation between European Union bodies: Europol, Frontex, EASO and Eurojust to collect data of the human smugglers, systematically capturing and destroying the vessels they use, establishing a new rapid return program for irregular migrants, also deeper engagement with those countries that surround the crisis countries from which the people are coming from, as it would be ideal that all the issues would be handled locally and people wouldn't need to come too far away from their homes, and instead they could return back to their homes after the instabilities even out and calm down.

Also EU has suggested help to process the asylum requests in the Southern European countries, that are the first receivers of those applications. Also one of the goals is to establish a sustainable and fair system to determine the MS that would be responsible for the asylum seekers, because clearly Dublin regulation, gives a

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/09/how-to-solve-the-eurozone-crisis/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.icrc.org/en/where-we-work/africa/libya>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/syria/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unwatch.org/category/issue/thematic/terrorism/isis/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/counterterrorism/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.icrc.org/en/where-we-work/middle-east/syria>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.marina.difesa.it/EN/operations/Pagine/MareNostrum.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> Regulation 604/2013/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 26th June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person

nice and sharp line for imaginary situations and small scale migration, but is not sufficient in this very real situation (Kerikmae, 1997). There is also a need for a lot more structured resettlement system of the people, because in the current situation, it is a bit of a mess. Also one big issue for the EU is naturally to try to find more safe migration routes, as it is not sustainable that now people looking for asylum from the European Union keep on drowning in the sea in the hands of human smugglers using vessels that are not in sufficient condition to safely travel the sea.

The migrant crisis has proven, that even though the European Union has had shared policy for outer borders, it has not taken to account the reality of the possibility of this kind of flood of immigrants, and legally speaking it is still not ready and finished, and there are several open questions, and the handling of the situation involves a fair deal of "going with the flow" as there does not really exist real rules for handling such issue, for example, the fair and even distribution of the costs and workload caused by the massive amount of people, currently handled by some states to a lot higher extent than by other states, but still benefitting the states that are not involved.

### **2.3. Brexit**

The third great crisis that the European Union has faced lately, has been Brexit, coming from words "Britain" and "exit", meaning Britain wanting to leave the European Union based on a referendum in 2016 summer. There are terms that have been coined to describe the type of divorce from European Union that would happen, "soft Brexit" and "hard Brexit". Hard Brexit means European Union and Britain cutting all ties with each other, in the sense that free movement between the rest of the Member States and Britain would not anymore happen as we know it today, and Britain would be completely closed out from the single market, and be left in a similar kind of situation as any other non-EU country that does not have any special trade deals with the EU (Ballesteros, 2017). The soft Brexit means, that at least to some extent, both freedom of movement and current trade relations would still be maintained.

In TEU, Treaty on the European Union that is more commonly known as the Lisbon treaty, there is Article 50, "1. Any Member State may decide to withdraw from the Union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements.

2. A Member State which decides to withdraw shall notify the European Council of its intention. In the light of the guidelines provided by the European Council, the Union shall negotiate and conclude an agreement with that State, setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal, taking account of the framework for its future relationship with the Union. That agreement shall be negotiated in accordance with Article 218(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It shall be concluded on behalf of the Union by the Council, acting by a qualified majority, after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament.

3. The Treaties shall cease to apply to the State in question from the date of entry into force of the withdrawal agreement or, failing that, two years after the notification referred to in paragraph 2, unless the European Council, in agreement with the Member State concerned, unanimously decides to extend this period.

4. For the purposes of paragraphs 2 and 3, the member of the European Council or of the Council representing the withdrawing Member State shall not participate in the discussions of the European Council or Council or in decisions concerning it.

A qualified majority shall be defined in accordance with Article 238(3)(b) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

5. If a State which has withdrawn from the Union asks to rejoin, its request shall be subject to the procedure referred to in Article 49<sup>9</sup>."

The fun part to keep in mind for the future, in case the doomsday like economic predictions for Britain hold true after the withdrawal from the Union, is that they have a possibility to rejoin if they feel like they would want to do it after all, for example if the public opinion changes.

The negotiation time between parties for the withdrawal from the EU is 2 years, and thus, as the United Kingdom invoked the Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty on 29th May 2017, the United Kingdom is to be leaving the European Union on 29th May 2019.

Angela Merkel and Donald Tusk, the Chancellor of Germany and the European Council President, made a proposition that it would be ok for United Kingdom to remain in the European Single Market, if the UK would accept the 4 fundamental freedoms that come with being a member to the single market: free movement of goods, services, workers and capital. UK will not be searching for a Membership to the Single market, the

<sup>9</sup> 2016/C 202/01 Treaty on European Union, Article 50

EEA, as they want to get out from the European Union jurisdiction and to not allow free movement to go on as it does currently (Kerikmae, 2001).

However, seems almost ironical, that before that, Theresa May, the new prime minister of Britain, after replacing David Cameron, suggested that Britain and European Union could make a mutual agreement about the residency rights of the Britons who live in the European Union area, and the EU citizens who live in Britain. However, this suggestions was not accepted by Merkel or Tusk.

As it can be already guessed based on the above, the Brexit seems to currently be the hard Brexit, instead of the soft one. What else might rise from the hard Brexit? It has been predicted by economists, that the British economy would suffer in both short and long term, the prices of food would significantly rise, and bigger corporations would draw their headquarters out from London and place them to European Union country, to be involved in the single market. However, we will only see the true impact of the Brexit after it has actually been carried out, and it is about looking at what happens, and not about speculating about what might happen.

### **3. How are all three crisis linked in together?**

The three crisis of the European Union discussed in this essay are interesting in terms, that they happens so simultaneously, that it makes one question if they could have something to do with each other, or if they are somehow linked. It could be assumed, that when it all started with the debt crisis, other countries that did not have financial difficulties, especially including Britain, were disappointed that they were expected to help with the bailout money fro countries like Greece. Then suddenly the migrant crisis hit and everyone finally almost forget the euro crisis. But then, when earlier on Britons had been displeased that they would have to accept cheaper than British labor to come to UK and to work there, there were all these migrants of whom they would have needed to take the equal amount of responsibility as the other EU member States (Chochia, 2015), even though they were already feeling like foreigners from within the EU were already taking their low skilled work away, and leaving Britons unemployed.

Then from the point of view of the migrant crisis, if you are a migrant for economical reasons, trying to get an asylum application accepted in order to gain a working visa after that, regardless of the European economy being in turmoil due to the euro crisis, the European economy is doing way better and there are way more open jobs, than there might be in the countries that the migrants who are looking for economical gain are coming from. Also European Union is a generally safe and peaceful area without war, in case a person is looking for a refugee status due to a war in their home country.

Then there are of course the rather marginal group of those migrants, that have to do with Islamic radicalism, in order to commit acts of terrorism to spread fear and to bring fire to the flames of an already complicate political situation, but usually when it comes to that kind of radicalized migrants, they come to the European Union when they have not yet been radicalized, and it might be that what they get is not what they expected, and the integration to the local society has not happened in the optimal way (Troitiño, 2017), and especially the unmarried young men radicalize over time wanting to pull revenge ion the frustrations that they suffer by committing acts of terrorism in the name of a group that at least accepts them as a member of their own and gives a sense of belonging (Roy, 2007).

So, I would safely claim, that all the before mentioned events have something to do with each other.

### **4. What is the best policy mix to tackle challenges and ensure a secure and prosperous Union in the long run?**

The question posed about the best policy mix to keep the European Union going is a difficult one, as I have no previous experience of the study of politics.

I would guess, that regarding Brexit, everything should be dealt as fast as possible. Even though there is a possibility to extend the mandatory two year negotiation period by a mutual agreement, I believe that to it applies the same as to removing a band aid: it will hurt less the faster it is done. Also there is the question about the soft and hard Brexit. Currently the reason why Britain wants to leave the EU is due to local nationalist opinions, and the will not to be governed from the outside of Britain (Färber, 2017). However, as it has been seen after the referendum, many Britons when voting, had been given for example false promises about using the excess money to fund the NHS (Azzam, 2007), as well as not being informed enough about what leaving the European Union would actually mean for them, and for some people only after the results were published it came as a bit of surprise. However, the decision has been made by the governance of Britain, and for the foreseeable future Brexit is happening. In the case that they would ever want to return to the European Union after Brexit, they at least have the possibility to invoke Lisbon Treaty Article 50 (5), which regulates the rejoining process. Legally speaking it is fascinating, that such addition to Article 50 exists, because one would think, that even the idea of leaving the European Union is such a distant opportunity, that there would barely

even be need for the regulations of the process of leaving the EU, without even talking about the possibility of the existence of regulation about rejoin gin the European Union after leaving it.

When it comes to the current way of Brexit, with Merkel and Tusk having blocked the United Kingdom from belonging to the single market if it does not accept the four fundamental freedoms, I believe, that it has to do with the European Union wanting to make a point to other Member States considering about leaving, that it will not be a nice experience, and without help they will be left rather alone, as in the European Union regardless of the very heavy and complex administration, there is power in numbers and the other Member States bring both economical as well as political stability to each other (Troitiño, 2014). For Britain this kind of process seems almost like a revenge for wanting to leave, but I personally believe it is more about making Britain a warning example of what could happen. Also this kind of very strict approach makes maybe young Britons more inclined to rejoin Britain back to European Union later on, as statistically speaking many of the people voting for leave were of the older generation, and the young people of whom statistical majority voted for remaining in the EU<sup>10</sup>, will live longer with the decision that has been made now.

Personally I believe that the current strict line that has been taken, will make the divorce unpleasant enough, as well as keep keep other Member States from exiting, even though that is not as much of a threat anymore, the way it was in 2016 summer.

When it comes to the solution of the euro crisis, I believe that it just requires a lot of time, and it also requires that the states involved keep to the budgets that they have been given and start shortening the debts that they have, in the agreed manner. Probably in the longer run, it is possible that regardless of the shared benefit of the countries that gave these emergency loans to Greece, the countries will probably eventually want to pardon some of those loans, because they won't be paid back exactly tomorrow, and after those loans have been paid off in one way or another, there is a possibility for the European Union to continue as economically prosperous as before (Ramiro, 2013). Writing the debts off would be a fast solution, but in all honesty, it would not help, as the countries who have given those loans would in that way end up paying for the financial losses that they have not themselves created. Also on the positive side, that not many people in the media have anymore been speculating with the Euro breaking, either back to the currency that there were before the eurozone, or about cutting the eurozone in half, and letting the countries with debt issues to salvage themselves, and only keep healthier economies without as much troubles in their own group as a part of euro.

Migrant crisis is a big humanitarian issue, because even if the financial resources to tackle the problem are limited, it is not right just to allow people to drown in the mediterranean, especially because it is impossible to know at a face value without processing the asylum application if the person in question would need a refugee status, or if they are just looking to improve their economic status. Because Europe is committed in helping those people who need a place of asylum from a situation that threatens their life. Migrant crisis requires a good view on the topic, being able to secure everyone's rights, without making European Union area an interesting destination for asylum tourism.

I would guess, that out of all the issues that Europe has had, and even though there are not as many asylum seekers coming anymore, as there were in 2015, the people will keep on coming, and also there are still a lot of people in the european Union area, who have not had their asylum applications yet processed, or that have not either been returned to their home countries after having their asylum application rejected, and also those people who have their asylum applications accepted, but the integration of those people to the society is still everything but ready. I would consider that even if new people stopped coming today, to handle all the applications and to give all the people the formal administrative handling that they have the right to, will take a long moment. Also integrating those people to the society will take time and money, as people do not usually immediately feel like home in a place where they have never been, they do not necessarily understand the local language, and the customs and climate are very different. However, within Europe there are both example os good integration and bad integration, and especially due to the islamic radicalism, and also from a financial view point of being able to make the newcomers effective tax payers to cover the costs of that migration, the integration process is actually very important. Also there could be a discussion about multiculturalism in the time when nationalism is at high after a long time, but it could be argued, that if done successfully integrating different kinds of people to the society will maybe help with the low birth rates in Europe, and in that way aid the continent to balance it's economical competitiveness, even when fewer people are being born, but also help people with being more tolerant and understanding towards each other (Troitino, 2013).

So when it comes to the migration crisis, it can be seen as both threat and possibility, either we will have a lot of new people who will help maintaining the economic balance, or optionally as some people predict we will have the costs of dealign with badly carried out integration, people who do not feel that their new home

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<sup>10</sup><http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-36616028>

countries are homes, and then they either will not become effective tax payers, or in the worst case they will radicalize in the situation of frustration, and cause a lot of humane loss for everyone.

### **Conclusion**

All the problems that there have been described and discussed in this essay pose a serious difficulty for EU, as before there has not been as much that the European Community or Union would be liable or at least expected to deal with, as an unity. All of the significant three crisis are still ongoing, and none of them is in any way completely finished and dealt with, and therefore they cannot be answered with simple "yes" "no" answers to find solutions for the problems that are all rather linked in together.

The most interesting underlying problem that Europe has, is that the Member States have very different backgrounds. When thinking of it, it is impossible to get such different countries to agree on everything unanimously, for example in the case of the Euro crisis the countries with more balanced economies were reluctant to save countries that had not had enough foresight and been pedantic enough in their usage of money. When it comes to the migration crisis, it is the more nationalist countries versus the less nationalistic ones, there are countries like Estonia that does everything in it's power not to need to take any asylum seekers they do not absolutely need to, and then there are countries like Germany and Sweden that are a lot more open to process the requests of asylum seekers and to get involved with the issue to solve it, instead of following it from the side trying not to take too much stance on it.

However, as we still have a shared currency, and we still have the European Union, to some extent, it could be said, that the steps that the European Union has taken have been successful, even though it sounds relatively messy, and for the past ten years the seems to have been nothing but crisis after another for the European Union testing it's unity. To continue from here, unless something big and unexpected would happen in this continent after this, it might be possible that the European Union would maybe even be stronger than it was before all of this, as there has been a moment too prove the shared solidarity towards other Member States of the Eu countries when they have been facing struggles that have not been the easiest to solve alone, and even though not all the countries have not been jumping of excitement to get to help countries that are in trouble, either with a sudden unexpected flood of migrants, or with their economies, the other Member States have still collected together to solve the problem to keep the unity that there is. even though solving the Euro crisis has had a lot to do with just trying to keep the currency afloat, as everyone is just as tied to it, and it might have even been momentarily a good idea to kick for example Greece out, the beauty of the shared eurozone is, that it wasn't done, because it would not be "right" to reverse the deepen gin of the union, when a country wants to be part of it, even though that country's participation its not economically the most cost efficient idea that has ever existed.

When it comes to this final essay, despite being intensely interested in politics, within the European Union as well as further away, I must note, that I have no previous experience in the academic study of politics, as all my previous education, especially regarding the European Union has been purely legal. The topics given for the essays were very much political instead of legal, and thus it has been surprisingly challenging to try to adopt a way of thinking and writing that this task has required.

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