

## **KBÍLÝ, JIŘÍ ET AL.: THE EUROPEAN UNION AT THE CROSSROADS: CHALLENGES AND RISKS**

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The European Union currently represents the most important integration unit within the European region. The greatest importance of the Union lies in a peaceful coexistence of individual states and nations since the end of the World War II., which we can objectively evaluate as a positive element. It is the tragic war experience in this geopolitical area that has become the main prerequisite for the application of theoretical definition of a unified Europe in practical policy. The foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community as a forerunner of European Union in 1951 became a significant milestone in formation of a common model of governance. Although initially it was about sharing two selected commodities within a limited number of six countries, the integration process deepened significantly during its development. Currently, the degree of integration is at the highest possible level in history, as the twenty-eight countries create a mechanism of common management in a number of policies. The dynamic development of deepening of the integration process, however, also reflects in strengthening of disintegration tendencies. In recent years, more and more critical views on the functioning of the European Union can be heard from political figures of individual countries or directly from their citizens. Most frequent is the argument of weakening of national states, which can ultimately lead to the loss of their sovereignty. The primary question is whether the current adjustment of the European Union mechanism does not create a deficit of democracy and violate its base democratic creational feature. This is the context in which the European Union is being observed within the publication that we have chosen to review. The very name of “The European Union at the Crossroads: Challenges and Risks” reflects that. The title of the monograph clearly demonstrates that the current stage of development is considered by the authors to be crucial in terms of the further existence of the Union.

The publication was written by a group of the twenty-six authors, the central author of which is professor Jiří Bílý from the Department of Legal and Security Studies at the College of European and Regional Studies in České Budějovice. The team of authors is composed of members of various scientific departments and universities in Czech Republic as well as in Slovakia, which highlights the professional side of the book. The content of the publication brings specific views on the European community crisis, which is reflected in the assessment of several critical segments. The characteristic feature is a broad spectrum of findings that

can lead the reader to create his or her own opinion. The monograph deals with a wide range of problems in current European Union, starting with the migration crisis, relationship with Turkey, ending with the views on minorities in Czech Republic and Slovakia, or the possibilities of expansion to the Balkans. The diversity of authors and topics is also reflected in the use of language in which the monograph is written. There is no one language determinant, as some parts are in Czech, some in Slovak, and the last subchapter of the monograph is written in English. Since the publication is addressed to the professional audience, readers should not have any problems with this aspect. The monograph is divided into three equivalent chapters, each of which deals with the specific issues within the subject matter. In some parts, however, the issues overlap.

The first chapter is generally defined as “Problems and solutions of European integration”, which is reflected in relatively wide content focus of this section. It is divided into six subchapters, each of which examines a specific element of the European Union. The introductory part deals with a basic question of what should be managed at the level of the Union and what should be left for the national states to decide on. In these intentions, the whole process of development of the integration community, from the creation of European Coal and Steel Community to the present state, is analyzed. The subchapter thus introduces the issue basing it on historical development. In the second part, the European Union’s foreign policy with an emphasis on European neighborhood policy is being evaluated. The author, on the basis of facts, emphasizes its importance for maintaining relations with surrounding countries. Particular attention is paid to the regional initiative of Eastern Partnership, which aims to cooperate and define relations with countries of the former Soviet Union. It also stresses the important role of Slovakia, while considering the future role of this policy. The third part is devoted to the accession process of Montenegro, which is considered to be most prepared among the Balkan states. The success of this young country is declared by a completion of the process of entering the country into NATO. An important question of relationship between the integration process of the European Union and NATO and whether they influence each other is also opened there. It is on the example of Montenegro that Russian interests are shown, with Russia trying to maintain its position in the geological space of western Balkans. After Montenegro’s entry into NATO, Russia has lost an access to the Adriatic Sea, as two major ports have become part of this integration group.

The relations with Turkey and the position of the United Kingdom in the light of the successful referendum on leaving EU are also considered as significant problems of the current European Union. The issue of Turkey and its accession efforts are a cause of intra-EU inconsistencies for many decades. The representatives of individual countries have a different view on whether or not Turkey belongs to the integration community, given the specific historical,

geographical and cultural attributes in particular. The authors quite rightly note that this is the case in which the deficit in decision making within the European Union manifests. They even point to a change in the positions of the member states over the last twenty years, as the view of the issue has changed with the exchange of political leaders. The objective of the subchapter is not to favor one opinion but, on the basis of the assessment of individual aspects, let the reader to get a better idea of the issue. In the same way, the United Kingdom is also inspected after the positive outcome of the referendum on leaving the European Union. In the publication, the development of individual events is very thoroughly evaluated, and the authors try to clarify and explain all these actions in broader contexts. Events from the United Kingdom are considered to be a threat to the European Union also in terms of amplifying negative moods throughout Europe. The rise of anti-systemic political parties is the evidence of this claim. France, Netherlands, Germany and Italy are defined as countries with the greatest danger of asserting such a political line. In this context, however, it should be noted that the publication was issued in 2017. This means that it was before a series of parliamentary and presidential elections in these important countries. On this basis, we can now judge to what extent these concerns have been justified. In neither country, however, these concerns have not been met. Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in Netherlands, or the political party Alternative for Germany were not able to gain any share of power. The only exception is Italy, where anti-system political parties have gained a very strong position. However, the Five Stars Movement and the Northern League have not yet been able to form a government.

The migration crisis is considered by the authors to be the biggest problem of the current European Union, which is reflected in the structure of the publication. A large part of the monograph deals with this issue from different perspectives. Within the first chapter it is related to the concept of multiculturalism as an ideology promoted in Western Europe after the end of the Second World War. The reader can thus learn about the nature of this concept, how it came about and what its specific elements are. The authors very properly put migration in the context of terrorism, since a large part of EU citizens consider terrorism to be the result of multiculturalism. "The Scarf Affair" in France in 1989 and 2007 is used as an example of the problem of coexistence of majority with Muslim immigrants. Even the idea that the vote of citizens in the United Kingdom for a withdrawal from the European Union was a result of not dealing with problems related to multiculturalism is mentioned in the publication. So most of the citizens of the United Kingdom voted for protecting their identity. However, such a perception is presented to the reader's reflection. Positive discrimination is also an issue that the authors deal with. The entire second chapter and part of the third chapter is also devoted to the migration crisis. The authors analyze it in various contexts,

presenting the possibilities of its solution. The protection of the external borders of the European Union is considered to be the most important element for optimizing the current situation. On one hand, the authors point to recent European Union measures, on the other hand, shortcomings of the whole system. The establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard is perceived positively, although it is problematic to define its competencies. The authors present specific suggestions for solving the crisis. The Australian model of migration policy is considered as one of the models. The primary elements of this model are based on the creation of detention centers for migrants outside the European Union. Thus, the police forces would be able to return migrants back to these centers. The authors try to compare the system of the European Union with the Australian model, identifying five kinds of obstacles: geographical, political, quantitative, financial and legal. The application of this model in the European Union is therefore rather difficult, as the European Union is not a single country but a union of 28 states. In the next section, the migration crisis is compared to the flow of illegal immigrants from Mexico to the United States and how the US administration is trying to eliminate this phenomenon.

The purpose of our review was not to inform about each part of the text in detail, but to put forward a comprehensive picture of the book and to show the reader that it is worthwhile to study the publication. The presented monograph deals with the current issue of the European Union crisis, giving several insights into the most significant problems of the present. Primarily, it should be emphasized that the publication is written by a team of authors from the university environment of the Czech and Slovak Republics. The broad-spectrum focus within the set issue provides the reader with the opportunity to become familiar with the complexity of the entire system of the European Union and the implemented policies. Criticism, however, is not the dominant feature of this publication. The authors try to outline possible solutions, defining the positive and negative aspects of these steps. The reader has the opportunity to create his or her own opinion on the issue based on presented facts. The publication is thus a suitable material for the professional but also for the general public.

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