

SHARING SOLIDARITY AND SOVEREIGNTY BETTER: TRANSCENDING «EUROSCOLIOSIS»

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The asylum-seeker and euro area crises have led to the questioning of two of the European Union's most emblematic foundation stones, "the Schengen area" and the euro. These crises have been addressed by devising a new shareout of solidarity and of sovereignty in Europe, at the cost of vibrant political controversy which, albeit beset by grief, has not hampered the deepening of European construction.

1. A "solidarity crisis" on the verge of being resolved

The crisis in the euro area sparked huge tension between the countries at the heart of the European Union (EU) and the countries on its periphery, one group reluctant to display solidarity, the other reluctant to adopt austerity programmes in return for European aid. The asylum-seeker crisis is causing equally strong tension at the grassroots level and among the member states, which have crystallised over the "Visegrad group" countries' refusal to display solidarity towards those countries struggling under an excessively massive wave of applications.

Yet these two crises have led to a strengthening of solidarity among the member states, ranging from the adoption of unprecedented aid programmes worth up to 500 billion euro, including through the creation of the European Stability Mechanism, to increased European financial aid for countries facing a massive influx of asylum-seekers, and to a compulsory mechanism for the shareout of 160,000 of those seekers to help Greece, Italy and other countries overwhelmed by their arrival. Finally, it is the choice to safeguard the integrity of the monetary union and the membership of its nineteen member states that has prompted the majority of them to display such solidarity; similarly, it is the will to contribute to the effective monitoring of the member states' common external borders and to a better exercise of the right to asylum that has guided member states despite their different starting positions.

This solidarity is far from being purely altruistic because it serves the interests of the member states displaying it by safeguarding the common assets that are the euro and the area of free movement. Nor is it unlimited: the mutualisation of debts, for example, is not envisaged, nor indeed is a balanced shareout of

the asylum-seekers in their entirety. And lastly, this solidarity is conditional, because it is matched by a strengthened monitoring of the beneficiary countries, which seeks to respond to the other, deeper, crisis that is also dividing the member states - and that is a crisis of confidence.

2. A sharing of sovereignty that also reflects a crisis of confidence

The euro area crisis and the asylum-seeker crisis have something in common: they have both revealed a shortage of confidence among the member states of a single monetary union or a single area of free movement who, because of that membership, can suffer from the actions of their neighbours without having any real control over those actions.

The crisis of confidence that struck the four "countries under programmes" was, of course, initially triggered by the markets' refusal to carry on funding them, to the point where the euro area's member states themselves became their chief creditors alongside the IMF. It is because those countries *de facto* lost their sovereignty that they had to agree to sign highly intrusive "memorandums of understanding", and it is in returning to the money markets (as Ireland and Portugal have done) that they can recover that sovereignty, albeit at the cost of painful budgetary and structural adjustments.

Where applications for asylum are concerned, the solidarity agreed to by the EU's member states towards Greece and Italy is also accompanied by a desire for improved monitoring in terms of the way those countries manage the Schengen area's external borders. This is why the creation of "hot spots" and the strengthening of the Frontex agency reflect a Europeanisation of external border control, thus avoiding a return to

national border monitoring which, while perfectly possible as a temporary measure, the member states do not actually wish to extend on account of its exorbitant financial and economic cost.

Thus the recent crises have prompted the member states to mark out “new frontiers” for European solidarity and for national sovereignty on the basis of a dialogue which, when all is said and done, has been virtuous even if it has earned the disapproval of a considerable swathe of public opinion, for frequently contradictory reasons (too much European solidarity for some, too much shared sovereignty for others).

3. “Growing pains” that have to be overcome: transcending “euroscoliosis”

In both the euro area and the asylum-seeker crises, the European construction lies at the heart of very lively public debate, at the outcome of which, however, it moves forward. It has not ground to a halt, nor is it facing apathy on the part of its leaders and its peoples as it did back in the days of “eurosclerosis” at the turn of the 1980s that was knocked out by the arrival on the scene of the “Delors Commission”. What we are seeing at work today, rather, is a kind of “euroscoliosis”, with crises splitting the peoples of the EU and putting pressure on its spinal cord (the euro and the Schengen area) though without preventing it from persevering in its existence and its growth, even if that growth is then slightly crooked.

This, because where both the euro and asylum are concerned, all of the countries involved have ended up willy-nilly shouldering duties linked to their membership of the EU rather than break off their ties with it. European agreements that are far from ideal, comprising “memorandums of understanding” for the euro area and qualified majority voting for decisions regarding the influx of asylum-seekers, have had to be forged under pressure. These painful births have on each occasion left visible marks on the agreements finally delivered, as well as on relations among the member states – but they have also given birth to a deepening of the European construction process.

The crisis of confidence that has struck to the EU’s two fundamental pillars can only be lastingly overcome

if the architecture of the euro area and of the area of free movement is strengthened, above and beyond the emergency solutions recently devised. The “Five Presidents’ Report” contains useful analyses and recommendations for the strengthening of the European monetary union (EMU), which will have of necessity to be rooted in a better sharing of sovereignty and of risks, with a European coordination of budgetary, economic and social policies on the one hand, and financial mutualisation through a European treasury and a euro area budget on the other. Guaranteed effective monitoring of our external borders and the stringent and meticulous examination of applications for asylum should also be based on further progress, such as the establishment of a European coast guard, the full implementation of common principles already adopted in the sphere of asylum, the involvement of Frontex in procedures for the repatriation of illegal immigrants, the creation of legal immigration routes, and so forth.

If the EU’s heads of state and government doff the firefighters’ costume in which they have dashed from one to crisis to another, and replace it with the garb of architects, the prospect of strengthening the EMU and the area of free movement may see the light of day. That presupposes that an attenuation of the crises, which would leave them the time to do so, does not then distract them from this imperative duty to act rather merely to react.

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The Federation of nation-states is akin to a Tower of Babel which will probably always bear a greater resemblance to the Tower of Pisa than to the Eiffel Tower. Because it organises union in diversity, its architecture is bound to remain both atypical and always to be a trifle askew. But that should not prevent it from continuing to exist or from growing further, even amid crises, as long as its peoples continue to believe that there is strength in unity.

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