KU LEUVEN

METAFORUM

Futuring Europe

Draft version of the manifesto by the
Metaforum working group, for discussion
at the symposium of 28 November 2018

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METAFORUM POSITION PAPERS

The interdisciplinary think-tank Metaforum aims to strengthen the KU Leuven's involvement in societal debate by supporting multidisciplinary working groups in which researchers from different disciplines combine their scientific expertise and discuss relevant societal issues from different angles.

1. Increased Use of Psychiatric Medication (2010)
2. Biodiversity: Basic Commodity or Luxury Item? (2010)
3. Socio-Economic Differences in Overweight (2010)
4. Traffic Mobility in Flanders (2011)
5. Conservation and Management of Forests for Sustainable Development: Where Science Meets Policy (2011)
6. Full Sequencing of the Human Genome (2011)
7. Secondary Education Reforms in Flanders (2012)
8. Towards a New Communality for Brussels (2012)
9. Studium Generale: Proposal for an Interdisciplinary Bachelor Course (2013)
10. Public Funding of the Art Sector: The Importance of Investing in Art Production (2013)
11. Euthanasia and Human Frailty (2013)
12. GMOs in Our Food Production: Contribution to a Nuanced Debate (2013)
13. Health and Health Care: Everyone an Expert? (2015)
14. Food Production and Food Security: The Incomplete Truth (2015)
15. Circular Economy (2016)
16. Time for a New Belgian Policy on Cannabis? Evaluations, Options and Recommendations (2018)

METAFORUM CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERNAL DEBATE

A university intent on contributing to societal debate must also accept its own responsibilities. For this reason, Metaforum also supports working groups that reflect on the KU Leuven's own identity and potential for action.

1. University, Church and Society (2010)
2. KU Leuven Climate Neutral 2030 (2013)

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1.   FUTURING EUROPE MANIFESTO

The European integration process has over the last 70 years constantly been analysed and assessed, both positively and negatively, as it is probably the most *comprehensive* political project – that is not a state – ever developed. Indeed, its proponents as well as its opponents have time and again debated how to shape the institutions, policies and the decision-making processes within what has become the European Union (EU). Even today it remains remarkable how an international organisation based on sovereign states has grown into a sui generis political system with a deep and far-reaching impact in many domains, both within and beyond its borders. The impact of the European integration process is such that it has triggered an almost uninterrupted debate about its pace and direction.

Unsurprisingly, a particular and reoccurring focus has been the *future* of the integration project, also among academics, as there is much uncertainty about the contours and direction of this political project. This focus has come in waves and has often been aspiring for a better understanding of what is unfolding within the EU. However, a rather important aspect has thus far too often been lacking in this debate: the assumptions that lie behind the European integration process. In other words, far less attention has been paid to the underlying principles, attitudes and values that are often implicitly enshrined in the EU's key documents. They have also shaped its regulatory frameworks, its policy choices and the conduct of its institutions and, until recently, have remained relatively uncontested.

In order to contribute to the current debate about the EU's future, rather than to directly look at the future, we propose to firstly take a step back. This allows us to critically analyse the underlying, often hidden but nevertheless dominant *Weltanschauung*, within five areas: Man, Society & Economy, World, Science & Education and Governance. Obviously, these five areas are not exhaustive. Neither can or should they be entirely distinguished from one another. Rather, they should be seen as connected and interdependent. Assumptions within different areas may also reinforce or contradict each other. In order to highlight the limitations of the prevailing paradigm and spark the discussion over a potential shift, we conclude by proposing some recommendations.

2. VIEW OF MAN

Through its various policies and the way it promotes itself to its citizens, the EU is perceived as presenting a view of man as highly individualistic, mobile, flexible, skilled, multilingual, hence able to enjoy and benefit from the freedoms (to move, work and reside freely in the EU; non-discrimination; political participation, etc.) and opportunities, that stem from the European integration process.[1] There is a perception that the focus of the integration process is more on so-called *movers* and the benefits they can reap from the EU, rather than on the so-called *stayers* and the costs of EU membership (like fears of social dumping, increased competition in the labour market due to migration, which featured prominently in the debate over Brexit). These *stayers* are, instead, the 'losers' of globalisation and Europeanisation, among whom the prevailing feeling is often that the EU has little to offer. The distinction between 'winners' and 'losers' (which is not entirely identical with the '*movers*' and '*stayers*') is by no means unique for the EU, neither has the EU created it, as we witness the same phenomenon in other contexts. However, the EU does not seem to have the right answers to bridge this divide. Rather than closing this gap, the EU often appears to deepen the divide between the movers and stayers.[2]

The EU's perceived focus on individuals fits with its narrative on diversity. Diversity is often applied to the cultural sphere (cultural heritage, different local habits and traditions etc.) as well as to the political sphere (freedom of speech, multi-party systems, open regime of interest representation etc.). Diversity is, thus, predominantly interpreted as the expression of individual interests and preferences, or one's cultural background. At the same time, the perceived attempts by minorities (for instance ethnic or LGBTQ+) to use the EU level to express themselves and gain strength are sometimes seen as a threat to pre-established societal and collective balances.[3] Conversely, a truly common model is perceived to be lacking, although the EU guarantees certain rights for all.

In a number of policy areas (such as social affairs, structural and cohesion policies), significant efforts have been made, for instance, towards the inclusion of disabled, low-skilled workers. It is not always clear, however, whether this is a goal in its own right (a decent and valuable life for everyone) or only a means to another end, i.e. an economic one. Despite its efforts in social and cohesion policy, the EU is seen as lacking a positive model of '*Man*' as a member of a system of solidarity. Instead, solidarity is being left to member states, while these national solidarity systems are often perceived as being threatened by the EU.

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[1] See Hurri's contribution, particularly on p. 3 where the EU invites its citizens "only to use it [the juridical function] for their own purpose."

[2] See, for instance, the same diagnosis by European Council President Herman Van Rompuy in his speech accepting the International Charlemagne Prize at Aachen on 29 May 2014: "It is urgent for the Union not to be seen as only benefiting businesses, but also employees; not only the 'movers', but also the 'stayers'; not only those with diplomas and language skills, but all citizens; and people not only as consumers, who like cheap products and a wide choice, but also as workers, who can see in others, competitors for their jobs." (https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/25750/142974.pdf)

[3] See the contribution by Chalmers, p. 3.

3. VIEW OF SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

The current economic EU governance structures that benefit the winners of globalisation are supra-national, while the protection of losers and the solidarity mechanisms are primarily dealt with at the national level. Additionally, the EU's supranational governance structures (and more specifically within the Eurozone), undermine the ability of national governments to deal with these imbalances and to provide social protection. Many of the policy areas that are crucial here, such as social and employment policies, have remained largely national, while the EU's efforts to address them, have not led to the results that many hoped for.

The view of *Man* the EU currently promotes leads to an understanding of society that is perceived as the sum of autonomous individuals, detached from local and social bonds. Local and social roots are not denied, but they are not expected to play a significant role. Often, they are portrayed as obstacles that need to be overcome in order to benefit from, for instance, the possibility to live, work and travel abroad. At the same time, however, the EU officially (and financially) promotes civil society organisations (also outside Europe), especially in certain policy areas (like social affairs and development co-operation).

Its view of society reinforces the feeling that the EU serves first and foremost the interests of the (neo)liberal, globalist and multicultural elite ("citizens of nowhere", dixit British Prime Minister Theresa May)[4] and its cosmopolitan consensus, while it is perceived to be unable or unwilling to meet the needs of those that are not part of that elite. In this light, the emergence of populist, anti-globalist, identity-based, and more exclusive views of society should not surprise. Once again, this is not a uniquely European phenomenon, but the EU's approach has often only served to strengthen this kind of contestation, while it has been unable to formulate an alternative that is convincing, both in words and deeds.

On issues such as sustainability and the quality of life, in order to improve the wellbeing and health of its citizens, the EU has developed a new narrative. To a certain degree, the EU also stimulates the development towards a low-carbon and circular economy. Once again, sometimes it is not entirely clear whether this is a goal in itself or only a means to serve another goal: economic growth.[5] The emphasis on the quality of life and the development towards a low-carbon and circular economy can also be to Europe's benefit. It places the EU at the forefront of new technological developments and, therefore, ensuring a comparative advantage in its economic valorisation vis-à-vis other parts of the world. On the other hand, the EU has already shown that different goals can be integrated and environmental and other policies can be combined. However, the means to effectively integrate economic stability and sustainability remain insufficient.

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[4] Speech at the Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham on 5 October 2016 (https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/10/full-text-theresa-mays-conference-speech/)

[5] See the contribution by Hurri, with reference to his concept of circulation, p. 4: "In the EU governing system, fundamental attachment to circulation means that everything will be assessed from the perspective of the functioning of the common market, competition and the four fundamental freedoms: free movement of goods, labour, services and capital."

4. VIEW OF THE WORLD

Given its own *raison d'être* after the Second World War, the EU has regularly and increasingly focused on the promotion of principles such as democracy and the rule of law.[6] It has done so rather successfully vis-à-vis candidate countries (as a condition for membership) and its own institutions (that are very much developed into a genuine political system). This is less the case when it comes to its own member states, an issue that is often raised to criticise the EU for not being entirely consistent in upholding certain norms.

When it comes to global affairs, the EU is perceived as a norm entrepreneur, regularly making access to the benefits of cooperation with the EU, conditional on the implementation of norms and values, hence presenting itself as a standard-setter or role model (also in terms of regional integration). Irrespective of its success, this is by some seen as the role Europe necessarily needs to play, given its responsibility towards the rest of the world. Others, however, criticise the EU for dismissing other value-systems and for being hypocritical or applying double-standards.[7] Often, it is said, norms matter as long as they do not interfere with the economic, geopolitical and historical interests of the EU. In areas such as climate change and environmental protection, the EU has evolved into a key international actor. Strong domestic policies have led to the development of an international profile and position that makes the EU an actor which seeks to push for relatively ambitious outcomes. Those efforts are however often mitigated by stronger (economic) powers such as the USA and increasingly China and other emerging economies.

More generally, the EU is often criticised for being insufficiently aware of its traditional (Western) Eurocentric and neo-colonial view of the world.[8] At the same time, however, the EU sometimes seems to be the only world power to actively support human rights and democratic values, as well as independent and unconditional development cooperation and humanitarian aid. This attitude is under threat given the challenges imposed on the EU by migration. On the one hand, there is the concern to treat people with dignity in all circumstances,[9] while on the other hand security, socioeconomic constraints and other challenges have put the EU's internal *Handlundsfähigkeit* and its international commitments under pressure.

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[6] This view is not uncontested. According to Alan Milward (The European Rescue of the Nation-State, 1993), for instance, European integration did not start because of democracy and rule of law promotion or the protection of Western Europe against communism during the Cold War. The origins were not even economic but rather the rescue of the national governments. The economy was at best a tool.

[7] See the contribution by Pasture.

[8] See the contribution by Pasture.

[9] See article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

5. VIEW OF SCIENCE AND EDUCATION

Excellence is presented by the EU, and especially the European Commission, as a guiding principle in its science policy. Excellence is indeed crucial to generate innovation and without innovation scientific research cannot flourish (not to speak of the economic and other benefits). The EU's appeal for every scientist, research group or university to aspire to achieving excellence should be supported. What is clearly missing, next to a clear definition of excellence, is a more inclusive and diverse debate on what science should be and how it should be evaluated.

Currently, great emphasis is placed on financing science for economic, social or even geopolitical goals. This is true with regard to smart and inclusive growth, vis-à-vis other players such as the USA, especially when it comes to the competition with its tech giants, and the research conducted in the area of security. The way in which research is organised and financed at the EU level often serves as a model for other government levels. It is therefore not a 'neutral' model. Neither is the focus on goals and (economic, societal, etc.) valorisation straightforward in many disciplines. Therefore, the EU should focus more on fundamental research, also clarifying its value and necessity to its citizens.

In addition, the trend towards further specialisation within science makes it difficult too for policy-making to be research-based (as scientists are not always encouraged to do research about the broader picture that is often needed to steer policy-making), and to narrow the gap between citizens and scientists. Therefore, more efforts to stimulate multidisciplinary research (that encompasses different perspectives), as well as 'open science' and 'citizens' science' to make it more accessible and relevant for EU citizens, should be undertaken by the EU.

6. VIEW OF GOVERNANCE

The particular model of governance the EU has developed often relies on the active participation of individual citizens and organisations of interest representation.[10] This can mean that some citizens are favoured over others as not all are willing or able to take part in the initiatives the European Commission activates, to allow engagement in the various phases of the policy cycle (like the consultation phase that precedes the formal tabling of new legislation). Again, these opportunities (that in most member states do not even exist), seem to benefit skilled, multilingual individuals. The same more or less applies to interest groups. Not unlike what unfolds at the national level, strong financial and organisational actors have more lobbying opportunities within this open and diverse system of interest representation, than weaker ones. The Commission, however, supports several organisations to take part in this governance model, to ensure that every voice is heard and that it can result in a somewhat more balanced approach.

The traditional model of decision-making within the EU is based on consensus-building. The costs are often a visibility deficit, the complexity of the procedures and a lack of clear-cut policy choices. A more preferable alternative view might favour increased politicisation based on majoritarian decisions. This approach may increase the visibility of the decision-making process, shorten the length of the procedure and generate clear policy alternatives, but not without costs. This could either lead to more uniformity, covert centralisation and decreased legitimacy or to decentralisation and renationalisation. Increased politicisation could only take place as part of a different model that requires broad public and political support, also by those that may be, if temporarily, disadvantaged. This, in addition to rules and structures that can guarantee a certain level of solidarity as well as political accountability for the choices being made.

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[10] On the term governance, see, for instance, Matthias Lievens, From Government to Governance: A Symbolic Mutation and Its Repercussions for Democracy, Political Studies, (63) 2014 (1), pp. 2-17.

7.   GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, a large part of the shortcomings discussed here are not unique for the EU as they exist at other levels and in other contexts too. This implies that the EU is not only responsible for these problems, neither should the EU be left alone to come up with solutions. But it does not exonerate the EU from trying to find solutions. In several policy areas the EU has developed a number of solutions but these have not always been very successful or widely accepted.

This is particularly true for the economic system that creates winners and losers. (1) What the EU should do, is to redesign its model with a view to effectively combining an 'open economy' approach (enabling it to be a powerful actor in a global economy), with a sufficient level of social protection and solidarity, both at the national and/or the European level. This could be attained by allowing domestic social systems to continue to exist with the support of an EU-wide basic re-insurance mechanism.[11] Achieving this combination in all member states of the EU would ensure the endurance of the European model, the European way of combining a particular view on the economy with a particular view on society, maintaining societies with a high degree of social cohesion (as Europeans formerly had) and a high degree of civic solidarity.

More specifically, within but also outside the area of social affairs, (2) the EU should redefine its shared values and present a more positive common vision of *Man* as part of a system solidarity both at the national and the European level. The introduction of a European Pillar of Social Rights is a step in the right direction, but more is needed to strengthen the social dimension of the European integration process. (3) Political as well as legislative initiatives are needed to breathe life into the Pillar and to turn its principles into effective (minimal) rights. In the meanwhile, European governance (such as in the context of economic policy) should leave enough space for the Member States to maintain and develop sustainable models of solidarity, with the financial support of the EU when necessary.

This stronger and multi-layered social dimension of the EU (4) should not only be to the benefit of the so-called movers that are mobile, flexible, skilled, multilingual etc., but also to those that find themselves in rather precarious circumstances merely because they are, for instance, low-skilled or part of a vulnerable group such as young, elderly people or migrants.

Next to this inclusive approach, the EU should be comprehensive in its own policy-making. In other words, (5) the integrated approach (particularly making the economic model compatible with social, environmental, climate goals) to avoid policy compartimentalisation should be strengthened. The good intentions, however, should also lead to the right measures being taken, as well as clear results.

Next to this vision-implementation gap in certain policy areas, (6) the EU needs greater strategic long-term thinking in a number of other policy areas, for instance migration and foreign affairs. Shortermism should be replaced by a broadly shared view on the kind of goals the EU sets itself, the role it wants to play vis-à-vis its member states and vis-à-vis the rest of the world, and what types of societies it wishes to create in Europe.

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[11] See Frank Vandenbroucke, Catherine Barnard & Geert De Baere (eds.), A European Social Union after the Crisis, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

(7) In addition, the EU should invest more in fundamental and multidisciplinary research. Multidiscplinarity is needed for science-based integrated policy (at all levels) and fundamental research to support long-term thinking.

These exercises should lead to realistic objectives. (8) Therefore, the EU should show more national and European leadership to counteract false perceptions and to scale down the sometimes unrealistic expectations. At the same time it should fight against the widening capabilities-expectations gap.[12] In other words, member states should give the EU institutions the necessary tools and means to live up to the demands of EU citizens, which are often fuelled at the national level.

In addition, (9) the EU institutions should do more to engage with citizens and to reconnect the European integration process with the domestic sphere. As far as political personnel is concerned, EU level politicians, like Commissioners and MEPs, should engage more in national politics while national politicians like ministers should play a more visible role at the EU level. As far as policies are concerned, a good example of reconnecting the European integration process with the domestic sphere are the joint efforts in the fight against climate change, although it is now somewhat threatened by emerging domestic and international contestation.

(10) Solving its domestic problems first would strengthen the EU's position and credibility internally and externally but should not be a precondition to make its voice heard elsewhere.[13] The EU has a global role to play and internal fragmentation should not prevent it from acting internationally.

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[12] See Chalmers' contribution.
[13] Contra what Pasture writes in his contribution on p. 8.