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Later this week, leaders of EU member states minus Britain will be meeting in Rome to mark the 60th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome which created the EU's forerunner – the EEC and EURATOM. Six decades ago on 25 March, six visionary statesmen, who will be known as the founding fathers of the EU, signed the Treaties of Rome at the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Campidoglio laying the foundations of the European Union as we know it. Once a continent torn by war, thanks to the European project, Europe rose from the ashes of two world wars and become the most peaceful and prosperous continent on earth.

With Britain set to notify the Council of its decision to leave the EU on 29 March and thus kick start the official Brexit procedure, the Rome Summit will be overshadowed by Britain's impending departure. In that respect the Rome Summit will hardly be an occasion to celebrate. As the UK is preparing to file the divorce papers to leave the EU, the remaining 27 member states will gather in Rome to renew their wedding vows.

According to Juncker, the Rome Summit 'will not simply be a birthday celebration. It will also be the 'birth moment' of the European Union at 27.'¹ The Rome Summit comes at a time when the European project is struggling to cope with existential crises on various fronts. Incomplete and halfway responses to EU's structural problems have deepened these crises. With high youth unemployment rates and the Greek economy ringing alarm bells, the Eurozone crisis is far from over. Moreover, the EU is struggling to cope with the largest refugee influx since the Second World War from the conflict-stricken countries in its immediate neighbourhood. These poly-crises have brought the key achievements of the European integration namely; the single currency and free movement under great strain and raised questions about the very principle of member state solidarity. Meanwhile, the European publics have grown largely wary of further integration. Eurosceptic populist parties have flourished in key member states. Distrust towards the EU and its institutions has peaked. Systematic EU-bashing for unpopular decisions made at the national level has further contributed to the alienation between ordinary Europeans and the EU machinery. Aside from these internal challenges, externally the EU has to deal with increasing instability and conflicts raging in its neighbourhood, an ever assertive Russia and an increasingly unpredictable White House Administration led by Donald J. Trump an outspoken advocate of Brexit. Last but not least, the EU will be faced with an entirely new sort of challenge managing the Brexit process, which is expected to be subject to extremely tough negotiations. The fact that

¹ Jean-Claude Juncker, "*Quo vadis Europa at 27? Avenues for a united future at 27*", Speech by President Juncker at the Plenary Session of the European Parliament on the occasion of the presentation of the European Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe, 01.03.2017 http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-424_en.htm Date retrieved: 22.03.2017.



2017 is an election year in five – or six- member states three out of which are founding EU members (in the Netherlands, France, Germany, Bulgaria, Czechia and perhaps in Italy), creates further uncertainty. Against this rather gloomy outlook, the EU is at a crossroads to decide the future trajectory it should follow. Meeting in Rome, 27 EU heads of state and government will rekindle the key achievements of European integration such as peace, democracy and prosperity which for many Europeans are either a distant memory or taken for granted, and contemplate the way forward for the European project post-Brexit.

Commission’s White Paper: 5 alternative trajectories for the future of EU integration

In the run up to the landmark Rome Summit and the official launch of the Brexit process, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker unveiled the White Paper on the Future of Europe². The White Paper, which constitutes the Commission’s input to the debate concerning the future of Europe, is intended to serve a basis for the EU-wide discussion concerning the future direction of EU integration. Leaders of EU-27 will be officially handed the White Paper at the Rome Summit. With the White Paper, the Commission lays the foundations of an EU-wide debate to be launched at different levels, which would culminate at December’s European Council meeting where EU leaders would decide on which path to follow. Moving from there a course of action would be prepared in the time for the European Parliament elections in 2019.

In the White Paper, the Commission outlines five alternative futures for the EU after Brexit which in terms of ambition vary from the EU being reduced to the Single Market on the one hand, to EU pushing forward to integrate across all fields on the other. The five scenarios outlined in the White Paper are as follows: ‘Carrying on’ (Scenario 1), ‘Nothing but the Single Market’ (Scenario 2), ‘Those who want more do more’ (Scenario 3), ‘Doing less more efficiently’ (Scenario 4), and ‘Doing much more together’ (Scenario 5). Based on each scenario the White Paper glimpses into how the EU would look like in 2025.

Scenario 1, which has been dubbed as the ‘business as usual’ scenario, is based on the assumption that EU at 27 will continue at its current trajectory with certain innovations, namely by pushing forward with reforms outlined in the Bratislava Declaration of September 2016 and Juncker’s New Start for Europe.

Meanwhile Scenario 2 foresees the EU being reduced to the Single Market. In this scenario, which would have sounded like music to Britain’s ears, had it not been on the way out, the Single Market becomes the EU’s *raison d’être*. Indicating that the EU is much

² European Commission, *White Paper on the Future of Europe: Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025*, 01.03.2017, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/white_paper_on_the_future_of_europe_en.pdf Date retrieved: 02.03.2017.



more than goods and markets, Juncker has signalled that this one is the Commission's least favourite scenario among the five³. At the opposite end of the spectrum stands scenario 5 which foresees the 27 member states pushing forward with integration in all policy areas full steam ahead and transferring more power to the EU. This scenario, which reflects a federalist viewpoint, is against the prevailing mood within the EU. With the ordinary citizen becoming increasingly wary of further integration, this would play into the hands of Eurosceptic and deepen the cleavage between Brussels and the European citizens.

The most realistic scenarios are the mid-range ones; namely scenario 3 which foresees the emergence of multiple 'coalitions of the willing' among member states who wish to integrate further in certain policy areas, and scenario 4 which argues that the EU should review its priorities and refocus its integration efforts in areas where collective action could create the most added value. According to this scenario, while increasing its role in the selected areas such as; innovation, trade, defence, security, migration and border management, in parallel the EU would reduce or entirely give up its role in areas where collective action is considered less valuable. The main issue with this scenario concerns the initial difficulty of reaching an agreement between 27 member states on which policy areas the EU should do more collectively and which policy areas the EU should reduce its role or should stop acting.

Scenario 3, which foresees the emergence of a 'multi-speed Europe', stands out as the most realistic among the five scenarios proposed by Juncker. The idea of a 'multi-speed Europe' is nearly as old as Britain's membership to the EU. Originally coined by the former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt in 1974, 'multi-speed Europe' in fact already exists in the EU through the Eurozone comprised of 19 member states and the border-free Schengen area comprised of 22 member states (and 4 non-EU states). In the case of the single currency however, all member states with the exception of those with 'opt outs' are expected to adopt the euro once they fulfil the Maastricht criteria. Moreover, the concept of 'enhanced cooperation' first introduced by the Amsterdam Treaty, also clears the path for cooperation between nine or more states when collective action is not possible due to the vetoes of some member states. However, the enhanced cooperation procedure has been successfully applied in two rather technical areas namely; in deciding which law would apply in divorce cases for international couples and European unitary patent. Meanwhile, the attempt to enact the Financial Transaction Tax by 11 member states through the enhanced cooperation procedure has faced some setbacks. Most recently, the possibility of establishing a European Public Prosecutor's Office through enhanced cooperation was discussed.

³ Jean-Claude Juncker, *Quo vadis Europa at 27? Avenues for a united future at 27*, Speech by President Juncker at the Plenary Session of the European Parliament on the occasion of the presentation of the European Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe, Brussels, 1 March 2017.



It is important to note that differentiated integration that is currently in force in the EU whether through the enhanced cooperation, the Eurozone or Schengen is practiced under exceptional circumstances rather than as part of comprehensive strategy. According to scenario 3 however, differentiated integration will become the norm rather than the exception.

Competing Views from EU Capitals on ‘Multi-Speed Europe’

The ‘multi-speed Europe’ scenario (scenario 3) has been at the heart of debates across EU capitals. It has been embraced by the original six members as the way to go. Convening a mini-summit in Versailles ahead of the Rome Summit to discuss their vision of EU integration, the leaders of the four largest economies of the Eurozone; Germany, France, Italy and Spain conveyed a strong preference for Scenario 3⁴. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande were united in their remarks that multi-speed Europe is a necessity and shared the view that the EU is faced with the risk of disintegration unless it enables integration at different speeds. Not all EU capitals agree with Berlin and Paris, however. As a matter of fact, there is strong resistance on part of the central and eastern European member states to the emergence of a multi-speed Europe. The so-called Visegrád group (V4) consisting of Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary in a joint statement released as an input to the Rome Summit, have voiced their concern about this scenario. While acknowledging that enhanced cooperation which already exists in the treaties could be utilized, the V4 have warned that any type of enhanced cooperation should be open to all member states and strictly overrule any kind of disintegration of the Single Market, Schengen area and the EU itself⁵. The V4 have been joined by the youngest EU member states Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania which fear that they will be left at the periphery and will not be let among the core nations⁶.

EU leaders’ first encounter following the Commission’s presentation of the White Paper was at the European Council meeting on 9-10 March. On 10 March, EU leaders except Britain’s Theresa May were due to discuss the draft declaration to be adopted at the Rome Summit. It is important to note that the first day of the Council meeting was overshadowed by the drama over the reappointment of Donald Tusk for a second two and a half year term despite his home country Poland’s objection, which in protest

⁴ Maïa De La Baume and David M. Herszenhorn, “In Versailles, EU’s big 4 back multispeed Europe”, *Politico*, 06.03.2017, <http://www.politico.eu/article/in-versailles-eus-big-4-back-multi-speed-europe-italy-france-germany-spain/> Date retrieved: 22.03.2017.

⁵ *Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries “Strong Europe – Union of Action and Trust”*, 02.03.2017, <https://www.vlada.cz/en/media-centrum/aktualne/joint-statement-of-the-heads-of-governments-of-the-v4-countries- strong-europe- -union-of-action-and-trust -154008/> Date retrieved: 22.03.2017.

⁶ Ana Maria Touma and Maria Cheresheva, “Balkan EU States Reject a ‘Multi-Speed’ Union”, *Balkan Insight*, 02.03.2017, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/balkan-member-states-reject-a-multi-speed-eu-03-02-2017> Date retrieved: 22.03.2017.



vetoed the Council Conclusions. Warsaw's reaction to Tusk's second term effectively torpedoed the spirit of unity that EU-27 was set to display during their discussions on the draft Rome text.

Meeting in Rome, the 27 member states are expected to adopt a joint declaration which will highlight the past achievements of the European project and send a strong signal of unity despite the looming Brexit and the plethora of challenges the EU is faced with. As Jean Monnet, a visionary founding father of the European Union wrote in his memoirs many years ago, "Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises." This statement holds even today. The nature of the crises the EU faces today requires the EU to reinvent itself. Regardless of which scenario EU leaders will decide to endorse in December 2017, the future of the EU should be based on mutual trust, unity and narrowing the gap between the EU and its institutions.

