THE EU AND THE WORLD: NEW CHALLENGES AND TRENDS

27 IDEAS FROM THE ERASMUS GENERATION

Faculty of Political Science, University of Florence, 31 May-1 June 2012

Solidarity in the European Union – a long way to go!?

By

André Berberich

Lisa Thormählen

Freie Universität Berlin

Germany

André Berberich

andre.berberich@fu-berlin.de

Lisa Thormählen

lisa.thormaehlen@fu-berlin.de

Introduction

Solidarity has been at the core of the European integration process since its beginning. In the founding years, 'solidarity' has been seen as the crucial tool to overcome the mistrust among European countries and to create a strong, unified, and peaceful Europe. A prominent example is the Declaration of the French foreign minister Robert Schuman in 1950. Schuman called for a 'de facto solidarity', that is a solidarity that shows itself through concrete actions taken by the members of the European project and that ultimately will further the European integration process (Schuman 1950).

Today, more than 60 years after the Treaties of Rome have been signed, 'European solidarity' is often discussed in terms of a 'lack' of European solidarity. However, it often remains unclear to some extent which kind of 'solidarity' is envisioned for the European Union (EU), how much solidarity the EU needs in order to further the integration process, who should show solidarity with each other, and how the call for 'more' solidarity can be translated into concrete policies.

This paper aims at investigating exactly these questions. Therefore, in a first step we will clarify the term 'solidarity', before turning to a discussion of 'European solidarity' in section 2. Section 3 will ask why we need solidarity in the EU. Finally, in section 4 we will develop some ideas on policies aiming at increasing solidarity within the EU.

I Definitions: What is solidarity?

'Solidarity' is probably one of the most invoked and yet one of the less defined terms in politics as well as in social science. In the case of the European integration process, the term is even used by advocates of a stronger European Union (emphasizing a 'European solidarity') as well as by opponents to the integration process (claiming that the EU is a threat to 'national solidarity'). One reason for the vagueness of the concept certainly lies in actors' various motives for acting in solidarity with others. We briefly outline four of these motives[1] which are often altogether part of showing solidarity, namely:

- A sense of community;

- Self-interest;

- Reciprocity;

- Political Obligation.

What the concurring concepts of European solidarity and national solidarity described above show is that at the core of every definition of solidarity lies some *sense of community* – in this case the contested question is whether we are part of a European community (as well as of a national community) or whether the national community is the only one that matters. Thus, the concept of solidarity requires some kind of belief of being united with others by a common cause. Just acting in a way that benefits someone else does not qualify as acting in solidarity (Borgmann-Prebil and Ross 2010: 3; Nicolaïdis and Viehoff 2012: 26; Stjernø 2004: 2). Common definitions of solidarity affirm this observation – e.g., the Oxford Dictionary defines solidarity as "unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group" (Oxford Dictionary Online 2012).

However, showing a sense of community does not necessarily mean that actors abolish their own interests which can clearly differ from common interests. Especially in the context of transnational

---

[1] Our description of the motives for solidarity is based on Nicolaïdis and Viehoff 2012.

solidarity we can assume that actors often also pursue some kind of *self-interest* when showing solidarity (Stjernø 2004: 16). However, it is important to note that acting out of pure self-interest without internalizing other's interests can be better described as 'cooperation' than solidarity (Nicolaïdis and Viehoff 2012: 29).

Thus, 'solidarity' often entails both, some sense of community as well as some self-interest. Therefore, it is often described as 'profitable altruism'. The term indicates that neither pure altruism nor pure self-interest lie at the core of solidarity. It also hints at the idea that solidarity requires some kind of *reciprocity*: In order to show solidarity actors assume some kind of reciprocity – even if others might benefit more from it than oneself. Actions taken without assuming at least some degree of reciprocity are better described as charity than as solidarity (Nicolaïdis and Viehoff 2012: 30).

The last aspect we want to discuss here is the often neglected aspect of *political obligation*. The point here is, that even though solidarity is based on free choice and voluntariness, once solidarity mechanisms came into being actors are often bound by certain institutions to carry out their 'solidarity duties'. Examples are the EU structural funds or the German solidarity surcharge ('Solidaritätszuschlag') on income tax that is used in order to fund public investment in East Germany (Nicolaïdis and Viehoff 2012: 31-32; Stjernø 2004: 2).

In sum, we can assume that solidarity contains elements of all four motives discussed above: a sense of community, self-interest, reciprocity, and political obligation. However, especially with regards to the European integration process it seems reasonable to assume that solidarity tends to mean different things to different actors (Nicolaïdis and Viehoff 2012; Ross 2010; Stjernø 2004). Therefore, it is crucial to note that in any given situation an actor's motivation to show solidarity can be more informed by one of the motives than of another.

II What do we mean by European solidarity?

After having discussed the concept of solidarity in general terms, this section focuses on the question of a 'European solidarity'. Generally, the EU is perceived as suffering from a lack of solidarity (Borgmann-Prebil and Ross 2010). Yet, what do we actually mean by 'European solidarity'? What should it look like? We will argue that we can already find numerous examples of solidarity expressed by EU member states as well as by EU citizens. Thus, the EU is not a 'solidarity free' space. However, what is missing is a *vision* or a *narrative* of a common European solidarity (see Habermas 2001). Without such a vision or narrative of European solidarity it will be difficult to enhance it.

Skeptics of a European solidarity raise several concerns when it comes to the question of how to increase solidarity within the EU. They argue that we are confronted with multiple asymmetries within the EU both concerning motives and expectations towards the integration process as well as the socio-economic conditions of member states. Another argument states that most people as well as most heads of states still identify with the nation state first – not with the EU. Therefore, when it comes to decision-making they will favor the interests of the nation state over the common interest of the EU (see also Risse 2003).

While there is some truth in all these concerns they still did not prevent the EU member states as well as European citizens to express solidarity in numerous ways. Some examples are:

- The 'Solidarity clause' (Art. 222, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) that demands member states to assist one another inter alia in cases of natural disaster or terrorist attacks;

–   The commitment to solidarity in several treaties and the rhetorical commitment to solidarity by national as well as European politicians;

–   The EU structural funds;

–   Transnational social movements, such as the 'occupy' movement;

–   The (originally French) initiative 'We are all Greeks' that calls for 'saving the Greeks from their saviors'.[2]

Some argue that these kinds of solidarity are still far from the 'one for all – all for one' kind of solidarity as expressed by the three musketeers in the famous novel by Alexandre Dumas (Nicolaïdis and Viehoff 2012: 39). While this is certainly true, it is, however, questionable if even nation states and its citizens live up to this high standard of solidarity internally. Furthermore, we believe that there are numerous ways of building upon the potential in terms of solidarity that the EU already has (see section IV). Two things are important here: First, we should not expect too much in the short term. Solidarity is a fragile and multi-faceted concept that needs (among other things) time and trust to come into existence and to grow. Second, the vision of a strong, unified, and solidaristic EU in the long term (as expressed in statements such as an 'ever closer Union'[3] or calls for the 'United States of Europe'[4]) can help enhancing a European solidarity that goes beyond agricultural subventions and economic benefits. However, at the same time, a strong Europe also needs more solidarity since integration and solidarity are always mutually constitutive as the following section will show.

III Why does the European Union need more solidarity?

Having discussed the concept of solidarity in general and with regard to the EU, this section will elaborate on the reasons for the need of more solidarity within the EU. As the definitions clearly showed, every kind of community is based on solidarity among its members, both to be able to identify as a group at all (sense of community) and to make interactions and cooperation more effective since actors can rely on each other (reciprocity and, in case of further developed and bigger groups, political obligation). This sets the basis for a profound need of solidarity within the EU, both on the state and on the individual citizen's level and, as said before, is expressed in the treaties (Article 3 TEU) and embodied by various political programs, mutual support actions, or the transfer of national sovereignty to European institutions, i.e., integration in order to make the EU more effective in a federal sense, on the state level, and by innumerable studies and publications on the (existing) solidarity among European citizens and its interplay with their European identity (e.g., Risse 2010). However, as the political, economic, social, ecological etc. developments of the last decade have proven, the 'amount' of solidarity on both levels is not enough yet to tackle the big challenges of our time successfully and with long-term solutions, on the one hand, and, on the other, to progress towards the 'United States of Europe' as many citizens (see footnote 3), civil society organizations (e.g., the Union of European Federalists[5]) as well as national (e.g., the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, 2012) and European politicians (e.g., the Commission's President

---

[2] http://www.egs.edu/faculty/alain-badiou/articles/save-the-greeks-from-their-saviors/ last access 14/05/12.

[3] The goal of 'an ever closer union' is mentioned in the EEC- Treaty and repeated in the Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty).

[4] In 2011, a survey carried out by market research institute 'YouGov' for the German newspaper 'Die Zeit' showed that 35% of correspondents in Germany and 44% of correspondents in France consider creating a United States of Europe a good idea. However, in the United Kingdom only 13% of correspondents supported this idea (source: http://www.zeit.de/politik/2011-09/survey-united-states-of-europe, last access 11/05/12).

[5] http://www.federalists.eu/, last access 14/05/12.

Manuel Barroso, 2011) claim. So, the call for more European solidarity (even if we will never be able to quantify 'how much' *more* this means) in order to keep the Union functioning on a high level and to preserve or, better, to improve the general feeling of a community among European citizens, gets manifest by shedding some light on two current examples, setting the scene for the policy recommendations in the last section of this paper as well.[6]

Obviously, the still lasting financial and debt crisis within Europe gives a first example since it has challenged the European political community more than any other crisis before. Besides revealing the political, administrative, and legal shortcomings of the EU as an institutional framework, political reactions and especially public discourses in many member states have often been free of any sense of solidarity at all. Even if all responsible actors contributed to the troublesome and dangerous situation we are facing now (the ones by breaking the rules and the others by not recognizing or, even worse, not sanctioning this behavior), the debate seems to be predominantly coined by a certain and simultaneously endangering one-sidedness: 'the others are responsible for the mess we have to clean up now and we will do that, but they have to pay or to suffer, respectively.' This means that, first, some of the countries which have been hit hardest still try to play games with the rest of the EU to avoid hard reforms while at the same time getting substantial support (problem of free-riding) and, second, that the countries which have the capacity to support their fellow member states try to give as less as possible to prevent the creation of a 'transfer union'. A stronger sense of community and the knowledge of long-term reciprocity (we will receive something back in the future for what we give today) could have prevented some of the derogatory public discourses and inappropriate political actions which even worsened the crisis. Again, this applies to both sides of the table since solidarity must not become a one way street from the supporter to the supported: strong member states have to devote their strengths to others to make the EU profit as a whole and the member states in trouble have to do their best to improve their domestic situation, i.e., to comply to agreed programs. Conveying such a behavior to the media and the general public will round off the manifestation of a strong European solidarity.

The second example is less inward looking and deals more with the solidarity of the EU towards other world regions and the people there as becoming obvious in the handling of immigration flows. The manifold problems and differences in the economic powers and living standards among member states notwithstanding, the EU is already a wealthy "area of freedom, security and justice" (Article 3 TEU) compared to other regions and especially to Africa. For such an area, immigration has always been a common phenomenon since – broadly speaking – migrants come to where the money and security is, be that the cities of the Middle Age in Europe or be that the Western world today. Given that neither the space and resources of our continent are infinite nor that everybody can find the life he or she dreamed of here, the EU's and the member states' dealing with immigration yet remains scandalous (not to speak of the general public which widely ignores the problem), particular in the less effected (Northern) European countries. As a community based on humanistic values and with a cruel past concerning the colonization of other world regions or, to put it in a more positive light, with specific relations to many African countries and their inhabitants to whom we are still indebted, Europeans astonishingly show very little to no solidarity with these countries and their people trying to come to Europe, either as refugees from regional and civil wars or as migrants searching for a better economic future. It is not only a matter of living up to the high moral standards formulated in the Treaties and often rephrased by politicians to show solidarity with people from the Global South (and, by the way, with the most affected Southern European countries which are left alone), but of human dignity not to let people drown in the Mediterranean or to suffer in bad retention centers for months as at least a certain sense of (a global) community should prevent. Furthermore, showing more solidarity can turn out to be advantageous in the long run and, thus, serving the European self-interest: as the European demographic pyramid is pretty

---

[6] Since these examples are very short and only superficially described, some inaccuracies cannot be excluded.

imbalanced and as we have already started to shrink, we are more and more reliant on people, i.e., employees, coming from abroad to fill in the gaps we are more and more facing. So, being solidly in this domain is a precondition for a strong Europe in the future.

As these two very short examples should have shown, the EU does not only need more solidarity than we can observe now to comply with its own claims, but to ensure its current and future functioning as a political union and as a strong economic area as well. Some potentially useful steps how to achieve this solidarity are in the focus of the following section.

IV How to achieve (more) European solidarity?

The following ten policy recommendations are based on two main insights into the issue of solidarity: first, solidarity cannot be enforced by or implemented in a (political) top-down approach from the European level, but is, to the same degree, a matter of national, regional, and local efforts which build upon existing potentials since there do not seem to be completely new concepts. However, improving already known approaches and tackling problems with well-established instruments should be a solid start in achieving more and sustainable European solidarity. Second, since solidarity is such a broad concept with lots of different understandings, we establish these recommendations along the lines of our definition, i.e., that solidarity consists of a sense of community, self-interest, reciprocity, and political obligation. Moreover, not every proposal put forward here can be considered as a policy recommendation in a strict sense but as a mere expression of the feeling that 'there is something going wrong what have to be changed' which is reflected by the fact that most of our ten recommendation revolve around the building of a sense of community or, as Karl Deutsch once put it, the feeling of "mutual responsiveness" (1958).

To start with the *building of a sense of community*, the first step (1) concerns the role of national politicians. They should end the blame shifting to the EU as it can be often observed in national public discourses when politicians, after having decided something on the European level, say that 'it was Brussels, not me' in case of critique. They should either show responsible for what they have decided in the European institutions as a group or they should stay at home and continue national policy-making. Otherwise, every feeling of a European community has no chance at all without that sincerity and transparency of European politics for the people. Closely linked, (2) even more transparency and awareness-raising by the media is necessary to enable citizens to control European and national politics as well as its interactions. Thus, politicians have to explain more often what happens on the European level and why, not leaving this solely up to nationally oriented media which often ignores European politics. This also includes that EU issues play a real role in national and European election campaigns. A logical consequence (3) would be to further strengthen the European parliament in order to make it a real parliament of and for the European citizens with full competences and equal representation, balancing the predominant intergovernmental powers within the EU which cause some of the problems discussed above. A fourth recommendation (4) is to strengthen the financial support for the growing organized civil society (e.g., transnational social or ecological movements), both in Brussels and in the member states and to encourage the building of European wide networks. Moreover, organized interests (not only economic interests or the tradionally strong agrarian groups) should become a better say towards European institutions to make politics hear the voice of civil society in the sense of citizen's participation, starting on the grassroots level and up to the European institutions. Fifth and beneath that rather indirect mechanism of influence, (5) the channels of direct democracy should be improved to give European people the chance to exert some influence together and, more importantly, transnationally. The European Citizens Initiative (ECI) is a nice tool for the moment, but it does not provide its users with enough influence in policy-making and is less attractive because of its high barriers. Last not least, (6) raising solidarity needs some actions on the individual level as well, meaning that especially young people should get a chance to better get to know their fellow European citizens to

realize that there is more than their local/regional/national community out there as they normally learn in their educational institutions. As a consequence, European citizens would be more open minded and could see themselves as members of a European community if they got a real European education from kindergartens to vocational colleges/universities, including theoretical knowledge and practical exchange experiences.

As far as *reciprocity* is concerned, the seventh recommendation (7) stresses the fact that, on the one hand, solidarity has to remain on a voluntary basis, even if institutionalized in the treaties. This means that both member states and the European people should not always rely on the solidarity of others without acting responsibly for themselves and without being willing to support others in return. This implies that no solidarity is and can be without any limit, i.e., no member of the EU should rely on the reciprocity of the others in a way that endangers the community as a whole by causing insurmountable costs, for example. Another aspect of reciprocity is (8) informing affected people about gains and costs of acting solidly and goes beyond necessary public discourse as claimed above by forcing politics to lay open all advantages and disadvantages of certain political actions, ending one-sided and populist debates on those basis important decisions are taken to support or not to support other member states.

For the third dimension, *self-interest*, (9) we need more constraints on reckless actions of one or a few actors which serve their own interests, but damage the community or other members, also including the phenomenon of free-riding which can go hand in hand with misread reciprocity. Instruments to prevent such actions or general developments (compare to the Common Agricultural Policy) are as always improved by control, transparency, and conditionality as accompanying reciprocal actions.

Following these restrictions on self-interest and having the dimension of *political obligations* in mind, (10) we need better institutions which facilitate European solidarity and establish clear criteria of when and how member states should avow for each other on the political, economic, and financial level. Obviously, this means strengthening the role of the European Commission as the guardian of the treaties.

All in all, we hope that these claims and recommendation will be something to get both European and national politicians thinking on what they could do to improve solidarity within the EU on a governmental level and among European citizens, given out of the perspective of young Europeans.

References

Barroso, José Manuel (2011). "European renewal – State of the Union Address 2011", Strasbourg, 28/09/11, see http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/state-union-2011/index_de.htm, last access 14/05/12.

Borgmann-Prebil, Yuri and Malcom Ross (2010). "Promoting European Solidarity: Between Rhetoric and Reality?" In: Ross, Malcom and Yuri Borgmann-Prebil (eds.) *Promoting Solidarity in the European Union*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1-22.

Deutsch, Karl (1958). *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Habermas, Jürgen (2001). "Why Europe Needs a Constitution", *New Left Review*, 11: 5-26.

Nicolaïdis, Kalypso and Juri Viehoff (2012). The Choice for Sustainable Solidarity in Post-Crisis Europe, in: Gordon Bajnai, Thomas Fischer (et al.) *Solidarity: For Sale? The Social Dimension of the New European Economic Governance*, Europe in Dialogue 01/2012, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung: 23-44.

Oxford Dictionary Online (2012). *Definition of solidarity*, http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/solidarity, last access 10/05/2012.

Risse, Thomas (2003). "The Euro between national and European identity", *Journal of* European Public Policy, 10, 4: 487-505.

Risse, Thomas (2010). *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Ross, Malcom (2010). "Solidarity – A New Constitutional Paradigm for the EU?" In: Ross, Malcom and Yuri Borgmann-Prebil (eds.) *Promoting Solidarity in the European Union*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 23-45.

Schuman, Robert (1950). Speech given on May 9th, 1950, http://europa.eu/abc/symbols/9-may/decl_en.htm (full text), last access 10/05/2012.

Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2012). "Angela Merkel über die Europäische Union 'Deutschlands Kraft ist nicht unendlich'", 26/01/12, see "http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/angela-merkel-ueber-die-europaeische-union-deutschlands-kraft-ist-nicht-unendlich-1.1267481, last access 14/05/12.