

Towards a New Model for European Governance: From Macro-regionalisation vs. Minilateralism to an Institutional Reform of the EU

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Abstract

This policy paper aims to contribute to debate on reform of European governance by offering a different idea for institutional reform. While it takes on the argument that a macro-regional approach is best suited to alleviate the multiple crises of the EU instead of an expansion of minilateral formats, there is a need for a less initiative and a more output driven approach. The recommendations move beyond this discussion and offer a solution for the “Dilemma der Gleichzeitigkeit” (dilemma of simultaneity), that the EU is currently facing.

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Introduction

Minilateralisms in the European Union have been present before the term became part of the academic discussion. Initially used in relation with the liberalisation of international trade, the concept became known more widely through Moises Naim, describing it as “smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem.”¹ The German Think Tank SWP has identified 14 different minilateral groups within the EU.² The concept lately became more frequently used as five of these minilateral groupings have been initiated during the last three years, amongst them the Three-Seas-Initiative.

One group comprises of i.e. the Benelux countries or Visegrád Four (V4). While Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg have renewed and adapted their fields of cooperation in 2008, the latter has gotten a new momentum especially after the challenges resulting from migration to the EU in 2015. Despite the differences between the V4 on the future of Europe, the question how to find a common European solution to alleviating the refugee situation is one of the uniting factors. But this is not the first time the Visegrád Four has reinvented itself. Created with the purpose, amongst others, to work together to overcome the communist past and to join the European Union, the V4 format has already undergone transformation after this goal has been achieved in 2004. Nevertheless, it is also in the common interest of the four Central European countries to avoid the deepening of a multi-speed Europe (despite only Slovakia has introduced the Euro so far) and to continue with the cohesion policy of the EU. Furthermore, a reform of the European institutions is as well a uniting factor, albeit with different rhetoric especially from the current Polish and Hungarian government.

Other minilateral formats in the EU result from European policies, like the Eurogroup. Moreover, the authors distinguish the minilateral formats from subnational cooperation (as well as ad hoc formats and political party meetings with varying participation) within the macro-regional strategies like the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), that have been

¹ Dominik P. Jankowski/Małgorzata Grzegorzóka (2014): Toward an Effective Minilateralism: The Polish Experience in the Visegrad Group after 2004. DGAP Analyse no. 8: 10. <https://dgap.org/en/think-tank/publications/dgapanalysis/toward-effective-minilateralism>

² Baltic States, Benelux, EU-3, Eurozone, G6, Founding Members, Non-Euro countries, Nordic-Baltic Eight, Nordic Countries, Southern European Countries, Three-Seas-Initiative, Ventontone Format, Visegrád Group, Weimar Triangle.

endorsed by the European Council since 2009.³ Apart from these, regional initiatives such as the Black Sea Synergy (BSS) aim to complement cooperation within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) respectively the Eastern Partnership (EaP). The V4 meet annually on ministerial level with the Western Balkans as well as the EaP countries.

The Pros and Cons of Minilateralism

All these different formats overlap in participating countries and/or areas of cooperation. In general, this is not per se negative. Given the increasing tasks that need to be resolved on a European level as well as the number of member states in the EU, which has almost doubled in the last 15 years, coordination especially in minilateral groupings can accelerate the decision-making process. On the other hand, through this the European governance becomes even more complex and less comprehensible. Not to mention the negotiation process, which is less and less transparent. Additionally, the big number of groupings in the EU does not necessarily translate into more added values for the participating states. On the contrary, they often result in more administrative work for the ministries. An increasing amount of meetings while at the same time needing to reduce cost for administration cannot lead to a more efficient outcome.

The above-mentioned phenomenon does not only relate to the member states, but also to the European Union, which needs to become more accountable to the citizens. The narrative, that Europe will be forged by crisis (which has proven to be true for decades) might no longer be sustainable, given the multitude of challenges. There is no doubt that the EU needs re-branding and it has to be perceived as capable to offer solutions, rather than creating problems. This requires not only a joint effort of the member states, the media, and the EU institutions but also the engagement with the civil society. Europe to be strong and united needs the bottom-up approach. With the enlargement 2004, a lot of civic education programmes on the EU have stopped in Central Europe, but information on European governance should be an ongoing process to explain how decisions are made in order to hold both the institutions and the member states accountable.

³ Kai-Olaf Lang/Nicolai von Ondarza (2018): Minilateralism in der EU. Chancen und Risiken der innereuropäischen Diplomatie. SWP Aktuell 7. https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2018A07_Ing_orz.pdf

Europe for Citizens

The information activities in all member states are necessary and the citizens have to take the task to deal with the future of Europe. A reform of the institutional set-up needs to take the people into account. The recent citizen survey conducted by *Friends of Europe* as part of its #EuropeMatters project in September 2018 draws the conclusion that “Without change and reform, the EU will remain irrelevant to a majority of its citizens.”⁴

Ideas for reform are hardly something new, especially when it comes to European governance. The White Paper by the European Commission on European governance was published in 2001, large parts of the (very modest) reform initiatives have by now been implemented, however, the first paragraph of the executive summary reads as if not much has changed since then:

“Today, political leaders throughout Europe are facing a real paradox. On the one hand, Europeans want them to find solutions to the major problems confronting our societies. On the other hand, people increasingly distrust institutions and politics or are simply not interested in them.”⁵

The last Eurobarometer Survey shows that although on average 62% of the participants believe that a membership of their country is a good thing, only 28% have the opinion that things are going into the right direction in the EU. 50% of Europeans think that Brussels is developing in the wrong direction (see D73.2 in the survey).⁶ The number is even higher in the three big founding members Germany (52%), France (59%) and Italy (58%), while in Poland (33%) and Hungary (42%) the number is actually lower. Czechia (52%) and Slovakia (53%) follow the general trend; out of the V4 only the majority of the Poles believe that it is going in the right direction (44%), which is only the case in 10 out of the 28 member countries. Despite those figures, there would not be a majority in any member country if a referendum on leaving the EU would be held. However, in Italy and Czechia less than 50% would vote remain (43% respectively 45% while in both countries 23% would vote leave, figures that are only higher in the United Kingdom with 34% and Cyprus with 26%, Greece also has 23% in all other countries the number is mostly significantly lower). Therefore, to bring the EU closer

⁴ An overview of the results can be found here: <https://friendsofeurope.org/publication/europematters-message-citizens>

⁵ European Commission: European Governance. A White Paper. COM(2001) 428 final.

⁶ Eurobarometer Survey 90 of the European Parliament: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/beheard/eurobarometer/2018/parlemeter-2018/results-annex/en-parlemeter-2018-results-annex.pdf>

to its citizens and to involve the public more in the decision-making process, the institutional structure needs fundamental changes.

Dilemma der Gleichzeitigkeit

What the EU is facing could be called a “Dilemma der Gleichzeitigkeit“ (dilemma of simultaneity). The term was coined at beginning of the 1990s by the German political sociologist Claus Offe. He described the need for undertaking simultaneously the political and economic transformation – as well as in some cases the nation building – in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain.⁷

In an article on Austria and the V4 co-authored with Erhard Busek in December 2017, we claimed that the EU is facing today the similar dilemma as Brussels needs to deal at the same time with: Brexit, internal reforms and potential enlargement.⁸ With the negotiations on the future of the relationship between London and Brussels drawing to a close (with still an uncertain outcome), the dilemma still remains (however, with a slightly adapted focus). First, to reform the institutional set-up for the remaining 27 members. Second, to agree on a new multi-annual financial framework including a compensation for the missing contribution of the United Kingdom. Third, to drive enlargement process forward. Additionally, there are ongoing policy crises on a European level including question on managing migration and refugees in Europe (which should be seen as a separate topic, nevertheless connected), security (with hindsight to transatlantic relations but also again connected to the two previous topics as well as EU-Russia relations) and the future of the Eurozone.

The post-Brexit EU needs to focus on regionalism instead of a Europe of nations. Without a concept for renewal, the Eurosceptic parties – in government or opposition – will only grow stronger and further divide rather than contribute to common solutions for the multiple crises the EU is facing. The upcoming elections to the European Parliament will already shape the general trajectory of a narrative that broadly can be summed up by the term *illiberal democracy*. There is a danger that those forces that want to destroy the achievements of European integration will gain

⁷ Claus Offe (1991): Das Dilemma der Gleichzeitigkeit. Demokratisierung und Marktwirtschaft in Osteuropa. Merkur 45(505), 279-292.

⁸ Erhard Busek/Sebastian Schäffer (2017): Austria and the Visegrád Four after the National Council Election, Foreign Policy Review, Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Budapest, 19-30.

further influence in the decision-making of the EU and therefore be able to block progress, perpetuating the narrative of inefficient European governance. To sum up, bold reforms are necessary.

Ulrike Guérot, Professor for European Policy and the Study of Democracy at the Danube University Krems as well as Founder of the European Democracy Lab, argues that Europe is in a time of interregnum, where the old order is not dead yet and a new one has not yet materialised.⁹ In her opinion, the question about the future of the EU is not deeper integration or re-nationalisation, but united, social and democratic vs. an agenda driven by identity. This is why, according to Guérot, Europe needs to become a republic. In her vision, the citizens would directly elect a European Senate representing the European provinces and metropolitan areas, a European President as well as a House of Representatives. These suggestions draw on the conclusion that sovereignty has to come from the people. The current system of European governance is too complex to be reformed, therefore a discussion of an alternative is necessary. Interestingly enough, on 10th November, the *European Balcony Project* proclaimed the European republic. Their manifesto claims:

“The sovereignty of states is hereby replaced by the sovereignty of citizens. The European Republic is founded upon the principle of universal political equality irrespective of nationality and social or ethnic background. The constituent elements of the European Republic are the European cities and regions. The time has come for Europe’s cultural diversity to express itself within a framework of political unity.

The European Council is hereby decommissioned.

The European Parliament now has the power to make law.

It will appoint a government committed equally to the welfare of all European citizens.”¹⁰

Europe and the EU are not emotionally the same thing. In general, the emotional narrative of the EU as providing peace and stability on the continent is fading and thus endangering the whole project. Dominique Moisi, French political scientist and writer, has set out the importance of emotions in politics. In his book “The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World”, he describes three main emotions dominating global politics: fear, hope and humiliation. Moisi explains his choice that all three emotions are linked to

⁹ <https://european-republic.eu/en/>

¹⁰ <https://europeanbalconyproject.eu/en/manifesto>

confidence, which for him is how people and nations tackle challenges and relate to each other.¹¹ If we look at the decision-making in the European Union today – and here especially in its member states, which are a crucial part of the current procedure – policies are mainly driven by fear. This seems to be a far less discussed, but much more important division within the EU, than the often mentioned East-West divide on migration as well as the North-South divide on economy. These divisions of course are playing into the concept as fear as driver of policies opposed to policies aiming to prevent fear in a society. Therefore, a core task of securing the future of the EU will rely on reforms that bring the decisions closer to the citizens, offer possibilities for more involvement, and make use of existing structures.

Recommendations

With the described *Dilemma der Gleichzeitigkeit* the European Union should use the opportunity to reform its institutional set-up as well as the ordinary legislative procedure. In order to increase accountability, efficiency as well as democratic structures, the following four recommendations should be implemented:

1. Reduce the number of Commissioners to 15.
2. Elect the European Parliament in a truly pan-European way.
3. Abolish the Council of the European Union and integrate it into the European Council.
4. Establish a Council of the European Regions.

Reduce the number of Commissioners to 15

In order to avoid the necessity to create new portfolios after each enlargement and to streamline decision making in the EU, the number of Commissioners should be reduced to 15. Countries should collaborate in the nomination process, e.g. 2-3 countries nominating a candidate together. In order to ensure that also small member countries get an opportunity to nominate a candidate, bigger countries like France and Germany should cooperate. It has to be better communicated to the public that a member of the Commission is not to represent their country and therefore a nomination from two or more countries is only rational. Existing unilateralisms

¹¹ Dominique Moisi (2010): *The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World*, Anchor.

like the V4 could be used for such a procedure. A Commissioner should not be allowed to be reappointed to ensure rotation. In the treaty of Lisbon the provision is already set out to reduce the number of Commissioners. The decision from the European Council to not apply this provision could easily be changed. However, one of the assurances given prior to the second referendum held in Ireland on the Treaty of Lisbon in October 2009 included not to use this possibility. As two of the four proposed reforms will require a change of the treaties, this could also be included.

As a second step, the nomination from member states should be transferred to the second chamber (see recommendation 4). Once the Council of the European Regions would be comprised of cross-border regions, these will propose candidates that are then elected by the European Parliament.

Elect the European Parliament in a truly pan-European way

That the European Parliament should be elected not in all member states separately and therefore make it a secondary election along national party lines, but in a real pan-European matter is not a new suggestion. The 73 seats that would needed to be distributed after the United Kingdom leaves the EU could have been used for such an experiment. However, the EP already decided to reduce the number of deputies from 751 to 705 and to re-distribute the remaining 27 seats to alleviate inequality of representation resulting from the degressive proportionality, at least a bit.¹² Again, a change here would not even need a revision of the primary law and could be implemented by the European Parliament. Nevertheless, the Council would need to approve such a reform unanimously and the member states would have to adapt their electoral laws. Therefore, the change could be included in the overall revision of the treaties, as the next two proposals will require an ordinary revision procedure.

Abolish the Council of the EU and integrate it into the European Council

One of the core democratic deficits within the EU is the decision-making between the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. While the ministers from the national governments decide on the European level on the regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations and opinions, they are part of the national executive that oversees their implementation on the national

¹² Denmark, Estonia, Croatia, Austria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden (each +1), Ireland (+2), Italy and The Netherlands (each +3), Spain and France (each +5): <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/eu-affairs/20180126STO94114/eu-elections-how-many-meps-will-each-country-get-in-2019>

level. In order to make the European institutions more accountable, the Council of the European Union should be abolished and integrated into the European Council. A Council of the European Regions (see next point) should replace the Council of the European Union in the legislative process. The European Council would continue to provide input for the development of the EU in close cooperation with the Commission. The president of the European Council will be abolished and the rotation system from the Council of the European Union (including the principle of three countries developing an agenda for 18 months together) will be applied. The European Council will meet in the nine different configurations on a ministerial level plus a tenth formation of the Heads of State and Government.

This would require a change of the Treaty of Lisbon under the ordinary revision procedure.

Establish a Council of the European Regions (CER)

This would be the biggest change in the institutional composition of the EU. In order to strengthen the principle of subsidiarity, bring the EU closer to the citizens, and foster cross-border cooperation, the EU should establish a Council of the European Regions (CER) to replace the Council of the European Union. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) would cease to exist, the CER would have a slightly different composition, however, significantly more responsibilities, rights and duties. So far the CoR can only consult within the legislative process and only in a limited policy areas as well as not make any binding decisions. The representatives are chosen by the member states and do not necessarily reflect the overall regional composition of the countries, as they can come from local and municipal levels.

A basis for the composition could be the *Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS)* on the second level, which would lead to a total number of 281 (including the UK). The composition is far from ideal as it varies in size, GDP and in some countries would lead to a representation by only one person. However, it reflects certain geographical, socio-economic, historical, cultural or environmental circumstances. It would certainly be possible to increase the number of representatives for the smaller countries (and adjust some of them in bigger countries), in order to best represent the regional identification in each country. The CER would have the following composition (without the 41 Counties of the United Kingdom respectively their 24 seats in the CoR) and would require a change of the Treaty of Lisbon under the ordinary revision procedure:

	NUTS 2		CoR
Belgium	Provincies / Provinces	11	12
Bulgaria	Райони (Rajoni)	6	12
Czechia	Regiony soudržnosti	8	12
Denmark	Regioner	5	9
Germany	Regierungsbezirke	38	24
Estonia	-	1	6
Ireland	Regions	3	9
Greece	Περιφέρειες (Periferies - Regions)	13	12
Spain	Comunidades y ciudades Autonomas	19	21
France	Régions + DOM (Département d'outre-Mer)	27	24
Croatia	Regija	2	9
Italy	Regioni	21	24
Cyprus	-	1	5
Latvia	-	1	7
Lithuania	-	2	9
Luxembourg	-	1	5
Hungary	Tervezési-statisztikai régiók	8	12
Malta	-	1	5
Netherlands	Provincies	12	12
Austria	Bundesländer	9	12
Poland	Województwa	17	21
Portugal	Grupos de Entidades Intermunicipais + Regiões Autónomas	7	12
Romania	Regiuni	8	15
Slovenia	Kohezijske regije	2	7
Slovakia	Oblasti	4	9
Finland	Suuralueet / Storområden	5	9
Sweden	Riksområden	8	12
EU-28		240	326

Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/national-structures-eu>

It might certainly not be the best way to improve the representation and democratic procedures, however, this would only be the first step in a truly pan-European second chamber. After having established the CER, the cluster of cross-border regions with a similar size of inhabitants would be the next step. In an ideal world, the composition would look like the map of more or less equipopulated regions of around 18 Million inhabitants in the EU that was created by Alasdair Gunn in 2014.



Source: <https://bigthink.com/strange-maps/668-nil-europe-equipopulous>

However, it is a utopian thinking to assume that national states would agree to such a reform as it could threaten the integrity of their borders and serve as a first step towards abolishing the nation state at all (apart from all subsequent following challenges for the administration and the population).

Therefore, a more realistic approach would be to go with already existing structures such as the Euroregions, including parts of the centrally located regions in the bigger member states to the adjacent cross-border regions. The main questions in this case would be which representative will be sent into the CER, as there is no corresponding regional elected official for such regions. Therefore, additionally to the elections of the European Parliament, a representative for the second chamber representing the cross-border regions should be running for office. This would additionally increase the European character of the elections. The chamber would in any case decide with a simple majority, reflecting the importance of the regions and not weighing in the national states through a qualified majority.

Right of initiative

Both the European Parliament and the CER would be given the right of initiative in close consultation with both the European Commission and the European Council. The macro-regional strategies of the EU will take over the consultative character of the Committee of the Regions. With this, the potential of those strategies to deliver, despite the “Three-No’s rule” (no new institutions, no new financial resources, and no new regulations), as with the CER there would be an institution that would have capabilities to both initiate legislation as well as allocate funding. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) can continue its work as a second consultative body. This revaluation of the CER as a second legislative body within the European institutions would also reflect the importance of the structural and cohesion funds of the EU, which make up a significant part of the European Budget (55.5 billion Euro of the total budget of 160.1 billion are allocated to the European Structural and Investment Funds).¹³

Future enlargements

Another advantage of the NUTS 2 scheme is, that it is already applied to the (potential) candidate countries as well as the EFTA countries. To apply this structure would also help for

¹³ http://ec.europa.eu/budget/library/biblio/publications/2017/EUbudget-factsheet-2018_en.pdf

potential future enlargements in the Eastern Partnership target countries. However, in the case of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – the three countries with the most likely accession in the mid-future – an adaption would be necessary. The regions in Moldova (including also Gagauzia and Transnistria) do not fulfil the criteria of minimum 800.000 inhabitants (although some of the existing distributions do exceed the bench mark of 3.000.000 inhabitants). The closest would be the Chişinău Municipality with approximately 790.000 inhabitants, but this number is only going to decline further given the development of the last decades and a potential membership after 2025, so that Moldova could potentially be regarded as one region. The same would also apply to Georgia. Ukraine’s oblasts fit within this scheme apart from the Donetsk Oblast (which is currently not under full Ukrainian jurisdiction) and the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (I am ignoring the City of Sevastopol, which would be too small, which does not imply the recognition of the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation). Including Crimea, Sevastopol and Donetsk as well as Luhansk, we would have 27 new regions plus one each for Georgia and Moldova, which certainly would not expand the second chamber disproportionately. Including all potential candidate countries as well as the current 28 member states, this second chamber would have a total of 357 representatives, not even half of the seats of the European Parliament (pre-Brexit, although the number is capped at 751 and will certainly be filled up again after the enlargements).

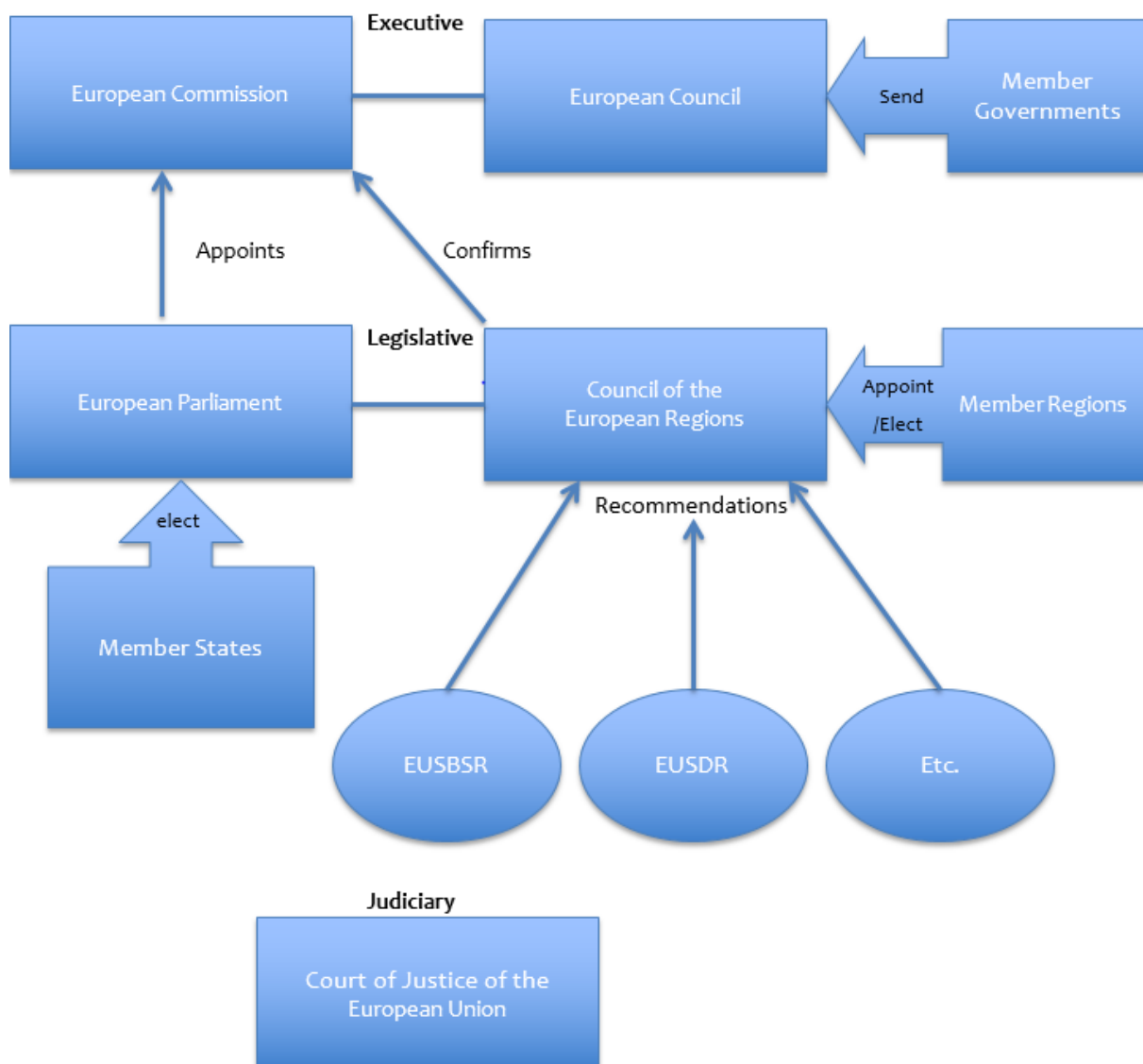
Towards a new model for European governance

There are more existing structures and cooperation that could more or less easily be adopted and used for the composition of the CER, for instance the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). A practical solution would require the analysis of the historical geographical identification within each member country and ultimately should only be an intermediate step towards cross-border representation.

As with all steps of regionalisation that have been implemented in the EU since the 1980s, there is a danger of fostering separatist movements in countries, which could be used as a counter-argument to the proposed model. Nevertheless, a second chamber might even contribute to alleviate this situation for instance in Catalonia, as the regions would be able to shape the decision-making process without having to go through the national states. Furthermore, the European electorate would be given far more possibilities to shape the legislative process through electing representatives for the EP and the CER, thus bringing the institutions closer to the citizens. Finally,

the EU can then make use of the macro-regional strategies that would serve as a consulting basis for input coming from the various formations, groupings or priority areas. It should be encouraged to increase macro-regional structures to include all EU member states.

A New Model for European Governance



Source: Author

A pan-European referendum

Ultimately a referendum in all member states would give this new set-up a real basis for more effective and inclusive European governance. However, as previous referenda have shown, there is a danger that the question will be politicised for national policies and not completely focus on the question at hand. Therefore, a clear formulation that can be answered with a yes or no question should be binding in all countries. Furthermore, instead of holding a referendum separately in all member states, the threshold of 50% should be achieved by the total of the population in all member states.

Although a revision of the Treaty of Lisbon would present also the opportunity to further deepen political cooperation among the member states, the possibility for success is rather limited. In order to make these proposals work, the democratic deficit will have to be addressed and re-evaluated beforehand. An argument for the Council of the European Union is, that therefore the member states are participating in legislation in order to function also as a sort of watchdog for subsidiarity. While the CER would also represent the member states, but on a regional level, there could be an argument for needing to safeguard the subsidiarity principle in the EU. In order to also include the more euro-sceptical governments and parties in the V4 but also beyond, especially when it comes to the reduction of competences of the EU, this could be an angle to try to initiate a broad consensus for reform: reduce the number of policy fields but give the right of initiative to the two chambers in the legislative branch.

One of the aims of the V4 cooperation could include the nomination of common candidates for international organisations. While it has been a practice in the past, so far it had very limited success. The new Polish government has contested the nomination of Donald Tusk as president of the European Council for a second term, whereas the three other V4 countries supported his appointment.

It is generally necessary to include candidates from the Central and Eastern European member states into top positions in the EU. So far only Tusk and for a brief period the president of the European Parliament came from the new member states after the enlargement of 2004.

TOP EUROPEAN JOBS	2004 – 2009	2009 – 2014	2014 - 2019
President of the European Parliament	2004 – 2007 Josep Borrell Fontelles (ESP)	2009 – 2011 Jerzy Buzek (POL)	2014 – 2017 Martin Schulz (GER)
	2007 – 2009 Hans-Gert Pöttering (GER)	2011 – 2014 Martin Schulz (GER) 2014 Gianni Pitella (ITA)	2017 – 2019 Antonio Tajani (ITA)
President of the European Commission	José Manuel Barroso (POR)	José Manuel Barroso (POR)	Jean Claude Juncker (LUX)
President of the European Council	Rotating every six months ¹⁴	Herman Van Rompuy (BEL)	Donald Tusk (POL)
HR CFSP/ HR of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy	Javier Solana (ESP)	Cathrine Ashton (UK)	Federica Mogherini (ITA)

Even if we take the Vice-Presidents of the European Commission into account, only Estonia (2004 – 2019), Slovakia (2009 – 2019) and Latvia (2014 – 2019) have held these positions so far. The presidents of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) since 2004 came from Greece (2003 – 2015) and Belgium (since 2015). They are elected amongst themselves for a renewable mandate of three years. Since 2012 the ECJ has created the position of Vice-President, held by a Belgian, Italian, and Spanish judge. The presidents of the European Central Bank (ECB) have been Jean-Claude Trichet (2003 – 2011, France) and Mario Draghi (2011 – 2019, Italy). The Vice-Presidents since 2004 came from Greece, Portugal, and Spain. Although not all EU member states are present in the Eurogroup yet, seven out of the 19 countries using the common currency have joined since the enlargement of 2004 and the presidents came from Luxembourg, The Netherlands and Portugal.

No institutions have their seat in the new member states and out of the more than 40 agencies only eight are located in Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁵ The two agencies based in the UK will be relocated to Paris respectively Amsterdam, which became necessary after London has triggered Article 50.

¹⁴ In theory the Slovenian presidency January – June 2008 and the Czech presidency January – June 2009 could be counted as held by a new member state after 2004

¹⁵ EIT and CEPOL in Hungary, GSA in Czechia, EIGE in Lithuania, BEREC in Latvia, ACER in Slovenia, Frontex in Poland

Conclusions and Outlook

The proposed reforms surely are highly controversial as they are fundamentally changing the decision-making procedure of the EU. However, without controversial discussion, the future of European governance will only be stalled as it has been the case since the White Paper of the European Commission from 2001, but this time the whole European integration might collapse. The five scenarios for the future of Europe published by the Juncker Commission in spring 2017 do offer possibilities for policy areas, however not for a reform of the institutions.¹⁶

No matter how the deal on the UK leaving the EU will look like, it is clear that the negotiations for the final relationship will take a couple of more years. This provides an opportunity to also work on the internal structures. Given that some of the suggestions made above will require a treaty change and an overall revision of the Lisbon Treaty should be the ultimate goal, an implementation until the next parliamentary elections in 2024 almost seems too ambitious. However, without ambition the European Union is deemed to be left to the ones who want to undermine its values and destroy the achievements made over the past 70 years.

In a realistic timeframe, the reform could be implemented by 2027, the end of the next Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) as well as the 70th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. A snap election of the European Parliament could then align the MFF and the term of office. Both a reduction of the MFF to five years or an extension of the legislative period to seven years could be a feasible option.

In any case the debate on the future of Europe should already be ongoing. With triggering Article 50, options for a reform should have been put on the table. However, it is to a certain extent understandable that the various challenges do not make such actions easier. Elections in key member states like France and Germany did also contribute to this slow process. Nevertheless, in a Union of 28 member states, there will always be another electoral campaign. But this also means there is a possibility for change.

Strengthening the regions might not be a popular approach in many of the EU member countries. Coming from one and working in another federal state, the approach might be too naïve.

¹⁶ European Commission: White paper on the future of Europe, COM(2017)2025, Brussels, 1 March 2017 see also: <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Future-of-Europe.pdf>

The V4 countries are highly centralized, even though to a lesser extent in Poland, however, the angle that might work here is the focus on subsidiarity. Although an approach of only new legislation if it replaces an old one is limiting the possibilities, a transfer of competences back to the member states is already now possible under the Lisbon Treaty. A concentration on policy areas might further enhance outcomes, however, this of course would mean the end of the Monnet method – something that is also the danger resulting from further expansion of minilateral formats, as they would ultimately foster a multi-speed Europe. The use of existing formats – both the minilateralisms and the macro-regional strategies – could further appeal to the V4. Finally, a blocking minority within the European Council for legislative initiatives could help to prevent fears of member states being dominated by their regions on a European level.

The policy recommendations hopefully foster a debate on alternative developments of the European Union. Because far too often the discourse on European integration is dominated by being without an alternative, which also contributed to the rise of populism. Politics in its very essence is about having different concepts. If we are not debating them, we leave the field to the ones who offer simple solutions to complex issues.

The EU and its member states are at a decisive point in their common history. In more than six decades of European integration, many crises have been overcome and a lot has been achieved. However, also a successful system is bound to fail, if it is not able to reinvent itself. The past years have brought many “firsts” for the EU – i.e. the Eurocrisis, a member country wanting to leave, the Article 7 procedure against Poland and later also Hungary – and we have arrived at a stage, where the governments of the member states define values differently. However, we also experience a lack of appreciation, both of the EU and also by Brussels for its member countries that are not only defined by their political leaders. In German values translate to *Werte* while appreciation is *Wertschätzung*, creating almost a dichotomy within the current challenges for Europe. But also the English language offers a play on words, given the dire state some see the EU in: in order to prevent the ones who try to pull the plug on European integration with Brussels being in the intensive care unit (ICU) at the moment, it is more than ever necessary to tell its people *I see you*.