

Reflection group on the „Spiritual and Cultural Dimension of Europe”
Summary of the second meeting: „Conditions for European solidarity”
Brussels, the 5th of May 2003

With reference to the outcome of the first meeting, group chairman Krzysztof Michalski highlighted the main problem to be considered during the second session. As a result of two major transformations – the enlargement and the drawing up of a common constitutional treaty – diversity within the EU will grow substantially and the demands of citizenship will increase. Consequently, new unifying forces and a strengthening of European solidarity will be required. The second meeting of the reflection group thus focused on the conditions for future European solidarity.

The debate was preceded by statements prepared by the three invited experts: Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, Paul Scheffer and Aleksander Smolar. Professor Böckenförde presented a critical theoretical overview of factors which might serve as conditions for political solidarity in the future European Union: religion, cultural heritage, history, community of values, national consciousness, a common political will. Aleksander Smolar and Paul Scheffer, on the other hand, focused on current practical problems that may seriously undermine future European solidarity. Aleksander Smolar highlighted three symptoms of a solidarity deficit in the relations between the EU and candidate member states: a growing feeling of inequality on the part of the accession countries resulting from limited economic support offered by the Union in comparison with the previous phases of enlargement; differences in position with regard to the problem of security; anxieties about equality of status in the architecture of the future EU. Paul Scheffer drew a number of recommendations and warnings with regard to future European solidarity from an in-depth analysis of two major socio-cultural phenomena in today’s Europe: populism and migrations. He insisted on the need to reconsider the issue of European citizenship with respect to both rights and duties of the citizen. He also pointed out that Europe needs to revise its self-understanding with regard to the question of borders, which will enable us to create a viable immigration policy based on a compromise between openness towards the outside world and citizen protection.

In response to the scepticism of the experts Romano Prodi ardently defended the idea of European solidarity. Europe may have its weaknesses and problems, he argued, but integration itself should be seen as a dynamic process extended in time. This perspective will allow us to identify progress in European integration, to appreciate the virtue of patience with regard to the gradual growth of solidarity in Europe, and to preserve hope in our common European project. In spite of the differences and disagreements, there exists a common European sense of belonging, reflected in the willingness of the Eastern countries to join Europe and in the common popular sentiment unveiled by protests against war in Iraq. Romano Prodi emphasised the complex and ambiguous nature of the immigration issue, which does not allow for simple interpretations and one-sided policy. He agreed that a sense of borders is required for the strengthening of European identity, if accompanied, however, by substantial policy action towards Europe’s close neighbours, as the Ring of Friends initiative. Challenges, failures and hopes with regard to European solidarity expressed by the experts and President Prodi, were then discussed by the reflection group.

Simone Veil gave European countries credit for the effort made since 1989 in terms of integration and enlargement, but also pointed out the weak points of European solidarity, referring to both the controversies around the war in Iraq and to the problem of immigration. Originally, she argued, European unity was based on the

values of peace and democracy. Both of them are now guaranteed, but EU members tend to ignore the fact that Eastern European countries have only recently regained political sovereignty and therefore prioritise security issues. A lack of mutual understanding is thus a major source for intra-European tensions, she argued. Simone Veil also criticised EU negligence with respect to policies concerning the immigrant groups, who will not only be a part of the future Europe, but also contribute to its economic wellbeing.

Alberto Quadrio Curzio expressed his objections with regard to the treatment of solidarity in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, where it is presented only in relation to the rights of labour. He emphasised the fact that solidarity is a subject of interest for various disciplines of the human sciences and does not allow for a one-sided approach. Even if considered only from an economic point of view, solidarity should not be limited to the problem of labour and state regulation, as it can also be created by the market and society. Besides static solidarity, which has to do with the distribution of resources, one should also take into account dynamic solidarity, which is connected with the creation of resources.

Michel Rocard argued that immigration-related policy will be purely symbolic as long as mainstream economics continues to overestimate market capacity for self-regulation and oppose state intervention. In order to remedy the problem of immigration, he argued, one needs constructive, selective policy and a variety of sensitive legal and financial instruments. In the next part of his intervention Michel Rocard insisted that the question of security is of fundamental importance for European solidarity and that the controversy around Iraq unveiled hidden tensions that will have grave political repercussions in the future. In a lengthy excursion he traced present disagreements back to the legacy of the Cold War period.

Bronisław Geremek's contribution was more optimistic with regard to the question under discussion. Solidarity does not require borders, he argued, it rather opposes borders of any kind. On the other hand, economic inequalities and competition do not impair Europe's capacity for solidarity, while a serious threat is posed by the controversy around foreign policy. Instead of looking for differences, Bronisław Geremek would rather look for openings and encounters. He referred to two great traditions of European integration – the Christian and the republican tradition – which, in spite of the differences between them, have contributed greatly to the consolidation of Europe. Such traditions should direct us in the process of solidarity-building.

Silvio Ferrari argued that solidarity is strengthened when people are sharing a project in the effort to overcome a common problem. From this perspective issues such as security or immigration should not to be seen as obstacles to integration but rather as integrating factors. Major social problems cannot be dealt with through regulation only, he argued, and this is why solidarity is such an important element in the long process of constructing a common Europe.

Finally, Will Hutton depicted solidarity as being connected with the construction of a just society and based on a feeling of empathy. From such a point of view, he argued, the social contract can be realised either by national or by EU jurisdiction. Referring to the political philosophy of John Rawls, he shed new light on the immigration issue. If a social contract amounts to establishing an infrastructure of justice, immigrant groups should accept both rights and obligations that are prescribed by it. From this point of view anti-immigration movements can be seen to a certain extent as defending rather than opposing solidarity.