



#RetuneTheEU
acreurope.eu/janzahradil



Retune the EU

JAN ZAHRADIL



In May 2019, the voters of Europe will go to the polls again. Citizens will be asked to choose what kind of future they want for the European Union, for the economy, and for themselves. The future of the EU must not be construed as a binary choice between either a fully federalized EU or no EU at all. There is a third option, and a better way forward.



We can have an EU that is scaled back, flexible, prosperous, cost-effective, and respectful of national governments.

With the right vision and political will to succeed, we can build a Europe fit to face the challenges of the 21st century. The upcoming European elections represent the last chance to save the credibility of European Project and regain the trust of European citizens. If recent national elections have indicated anything, it is that European voters favor parties that respond to their genuine concerns, hopes, and aspirations. Brussels does not know better than voters and common citizens of the EU. We need the opposite of the so called “Brussels Bubble”: we need EU cooperation that is driven by the interests of Member States, their citizens, and the taxpayers. The time of rushed integration driven by ambitions of Brussels bureaucrats shall come to end.

When I entered European politics more than two decades ago, I was motivated by honest devotion to create democracy and cooperation within Europe. Now,

I am afraid that without meaningful reform the European Project will buckle underneath the weight of its own self-propelling ambitions. To me, the voice that matters most, is the voice of voters.



Having grown up under a Communist regime, I know that it is our responsibility to voters and their interest that should guide us - not the ambitions of democratically illegitimate technocrats that create crippling bureaucracy and regulation.

We have experienced challenging times. There is a long road to recovery ahead of us. Europe is challenged by an increasingly assertive Russia, and a migration crisis, and thus the EU must be able to deliver now more than ever. I believe that a fresh approach in the European Commission can assist EU Member States in finding answers to citizens' needs and interests. So far, the only answer for the above mentioned challenges was the notorious old tune “more Europe, more Europe and even more Europe”.

I am prepared to become such a leader, selected on the basis of mandate and decision of the heads of national governments who, according to the Treaties, are the only ones eligible to pick the Commission President.



THE GREAT REVIEW

The most successful organisations in the world of business are those with the ability to be their own toughest critic. Too often in the quest for self-promotion, the EU has lost the ability of critical self-reflection. It was not a convenient strategy for long-term stability or public confidence. However, laws that were adopted ten years ago, agencies that were created twenty years ago, and treaties that were built for another political age, need serious analysis and revaluation to meet the challenges of today. In order to make the most cost-effective and efficient EU possible, we need a "Great Review".

“
The entire force of my
European Commission
will be focused on
the assessment of
the whole of “acquis
communautaire”.

This would also mean a thorough revision of the EEAS and a cost-benefit analysis of the EU Agencies, including the possibility of funding them from sources outside the EU budget. Where there is an urgent need for new legislation, the European Commission will make its recommendation to the European Council to decide unanimously whether to move forward. In all other instances, all new and pending proposals will be completely frozen.

FLEXIBLE INTEGRATION, NOT “ONE SIZE FITS ALL”

The EU task should be reinforcing the place of Europe in the world, not attempting to replace national governments. We do not need a common European solution to every problem that exists. We need common European solutions in the areas where there is added value from working collectively such as: research, a single market, and trade agreements.

What the citizens of European countries do not want is Brussels imposing a one-size-fits-all policy on their values, areas of cooperation and national traditions. Should this mean a change of the Treaties, let us face it. We need Treaties crafted by Member States which are treated equally; big and small, old and new.

The EU has been surviving on crisis management mode too long. We are convinced that the way out of our current impasse is by the principle of flexible integration.

“
This means a form of
cooperation wherein
Member States create
practical partnerships
and are free to select
the level of integration
that suits them best,
without being forced
into a single pathway
shared by the whole
Union.

Within such framework of cooperation, Member States continue to set a common agenda. Such a concept is nothing new for the EU. Member States already constitute a colorful mosaic of overlapping groups in some areas which manifests itself in ad-hoc collaboration - sometimes even out of the Treaty framework. What is more, the current EU treaties already contain flexible mechanisms such as enhanced cooperation and constructive abstention. Notwithstanding, the principle of flexible integration is not compatible with the progressive intrusion of QMV into unanimous decision making.

SECURITY FOR CITIZENS

The migration crisis revealed one clear fact - solidarity can only be built upon political will. Forcing unwanted rules, threatening sanctions or financial penalties upon Member States, damage European solidarity and public opinion of the European Project.

The proposed relocation mechanism highlighted the fact that when it came to breaking the rules, some countries

were not held to account in the same way as many of the newer Member States.

The greatest strength of the EU is its diversity, and we should draw upon individual and varied strengths in order to have an effective, multi-faceted approach to migration that respects the sovereignty of Member States and citizens in different countries.



We need a FRONTEX Agency to practically assist border states to cope with migration. But we must be aware that no EU agency can legitimately replace national capacities and capabilities.



Mr Juncker says he needs to recruit 10,000 more employees to FRONTEX. Contrary to that I say, the EU shall provide its border states with means to arrange for sufficient national capacities to guard their frontiers.

To allow for this development we need a different structure of the EU budget that will reflect actual demands. Nevertheless, that does not mean raising budget ceilings or curbing the cohesion policy funds that can eventually play a key role in the development and natural convergence of EU economies. Reshuffling the EU budget and the aforementioned "Great Review" would enable us find sufficient resources within the current scheme. Speaking from my own experience as a member of the European Parliament, establishing one seat for the EP could save 160 million euros annually. The 160 million euros spent on Brussels - Strasbourg travelling circus is equal to half of the current annual budget of FRONTEX.

Let there be no mistake, given the complex nature of current security environment, solid security of external borders cannot mitigate the entire range of risks coming to Europe. Complementary and better coordinated efforts in defense and military procurement among Member States is needed.



Nevertheless, such enhanced cooperation in security affairs, must not lead to duplication of assets, discrimination of non-participating states, and most importantly it must not diminish the strategic importance of NATO.

Should the EU pull its strategic weight that corresponds with its global economic ambitions, then it should put more effort into the coordination of its energy security.



In practical terms it would mean securing the diversity of supplies, reducing the EU's dependency on Russia.

European solidarity will remain a vain word, if some member states keep pursuing energy projects (Nordstream II) that harm the strategic and economic stability of fellow Member States.

EU AS GLOBAL LEADER IN FREE TRADE

When the Czech Republic joined the EU, the Union was perceived as the zone of opportunity and prosperity. If the EU fails to deliver on these expectations, then EU backing will continue to diminish. I have been a passionate supporter of free and liberal trade since the start of my political career. Yet, in order to create jobs, growth, and for businesses to flourish, we need to help create the right regulatory and economic conditions. After all, the EU is a trading block, not a social security scheme. The EU has already achieved a lot in this respect. One example for all: FTA EU-Japan will create the largest world free trade area. But we can't stop there.



I believe that the EU could and should sign at least 10 similar Free Trade Agreements with Asia, Africa and Latin America by 2024.

Another key to strengthening our economy in the coming years will be proper completion of the Single Market. The European Commission needs a reinvig-

orated approach to the opening of the service market. The common market is a success of the European integration project. None of the necessary reforms will jeopardize this common ground. Participation in the common market is beneficial to all Member States.



All Member States must enjoy equal access to opportunities offered by the common market, and the same options for setting up parameters, as well as the same obligation to adhere to all of its rules and commitments.

What is essential is that the common market must support the legal free movement of persons, goods, services, and capital. However, the common market must not be used as a pretext for creating additional regulation such as attempts to harmonize taxes, as well as social and health care systems. European diversity and tax competition are one of the sources of European prosperity.

A MULTI-CURRENCY EU



Furthermore, the decision to adopt the euro must be made by the Member States themselves, once they have considered their own economic and political interests and as long as they meet the necessary macroeconomic criteria.

The discord between the dogma of an ever-closer union and the political reality in Member States is diverging. The paramount example thereof is the question of single currency.

Present treaties are predicated on the principle that the EU's currency is the euro. All EU Member States are obliged to adopt the common currency in the future, apart from Denmark and the United Kingdom (which is now leaving), which have negotiated permanent opt-outs. However, a significant group of Member States have long declared that they do not intend to join the project of European Economic and Monetary Union.

In accordance with the principle of flexible integration, the obligation to adopt the common currency must become a mere option, without making the potential future adoption of the euro more difficult, should a Member State later deem it more sensible and beneficial.

One of the strongest arguments for abandoning a single-currency EU is the fundamental change to the Eurozone in recent years. Member States that had previously committed themselves to adopt the euro have not been given the chance to adequately express their opinions on such important policy changes such as the introduction of European bailout funds and other measures underwriting the budget commitments of Eurozone Member States.

A more integrated federalized Euro, complete with a finance Minister and Agency, and more complex regulation is not what the Euro needs to function well. Rather, we need rules that incentivize a continual pursuit of market stability.

MORE POWER FOR NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS



Another step in the direction we wish to take is to strengthen oversight by national parliaments. This already began with the Lisbon Treaty which introduced an early warning mechanism in the form of “yellow-card” procedure. However, the procedure has proved to be ineffective in practice as it does not impose any legal obligation on the Commission to act.

Therefore I propose following two measures:

“Red-card procedure”

A third of national parliaments would be authorized to stop the legislative process at the EU level and they would be able to do so within a period twice as long as today (16 weeks). If these conditions are met, the EC shall withdraw the draft.

“

Red-card procedure and Return ticket procedure are intended to provide genuine implementation of the subsidiarity principle. This principle says that decisions should be made always as close to citizens as possible.

“Return ticket procedure”

By activating a review clause, a third or more national parliaments will be able to propose removal of any piece of EU legislation and the EU institutions shall act upon the proposal.

Today, the EU may resolve all matters that cannot be satisfactorily resolved on individual state level, and which may be better solved at the EU level. In practice, this deprives Member States of the option to make independent decisions outside the areas where they share a competence.

THE ULTIMATE GOAL - WINNING BACK TRUST

Brussels, the European Commission, and the European Parliament are the servants of the people. The best way to serve the people of Europe is to listen, and then to act upon what they are saying.

The more Brussels disregards legitimate concerns of Member States citizens', the more Brussels will struggle to win back their trust.



**Whether labeled
Europhiles, Eurosceptic,
populists, or extremists,
they are all taxpayers
directly paying for the
construction of the EU,
and they all deserve to
be listened to equally.**

We do not attempt to predict all future political and economic developments. However, if we only follow abstract ideology, no one will benefit. Reform of the EU should be led by principles of common sense. Let us not therefore attempt social engineering. Let us not succumb to the false belief that we can predict and manage all unintended consequences and second order effects of human activity. Let us not construct an artificial world. Europe has created one of the wealthiest and most dynamic civilisations in human history, and it must make the best of its strong points. But it needs a different tune.

Let's retune the EU!



#RetuneTheEU
acreurope.eu/janzahradil



acreurope.eu/janzahradil



[twitter.com/
ZahradilJan](https://twitter.com/ZahradilJan)



[facebook.com/
jzahradil](https://facebook.com/jzahradil)



[instagram.com/
jan.zahradil](https://instagram.com/jan.zahradil)



The ACRE is recognised and partially funded by the European Parliament. Sole liability rests with the author and the European Parliament is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.