



Subsidiarity in the EU: From principle to practice

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This year we celebrate a double anniversary. First, 2019 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1989; but it is also the fifteenth anniversary of the 2004 enlargement that saw 10 countries join the EU. Both of these events were symbols of the reunification of Europe after the divisions caused by the Second World War and the Cold War, and thus they raised new hope among the people of Europe. Caught up in the euphoria of ‘the end of history’, as Francis Fukuyama called it, most failed to see that reunification would bring with it a series of new challenges. As the situation developed, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the conflicts erupting in the Western Balkans and in the post-Soviet countries from 1989 onwards demonstrated that war is always a possibility. Moreover, the 2004 enlargement and those that followed it came with many difficulties. These can be explained, in part, by the lack of preparation on the part of both the EU and the new member states. Another factor was the lack of understanding of the implications of the enlargement. Among these was the emergence of several divides within the EU: geographical, economic and political. This showed clearly that it would require further effort to truly reunify Europe.

The sequence of crises which has struck our Union—the financial crisis, debt crisis, migration crisis and more—has been met with various reactions. Some have advocated pulling back from the EU, calling for less ‘Brussels’ in national politics. Sadly, such calls have resulted in Brexit, even though, at this stage, the actual terms and conditions of the UK’s departure from the EU remain to be determined. Others, mainly in liberal and socialist ranks, have called for more Europe as the cure for all ills, supporting the establishment of a strong centralised European state. This would ultimately be counterproductive. While there is a genuine European identity, shaped by centuries of shared history, and while it is laudable to underline this common heritage, we should not underestimate

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the importance of our national and regional identities and cultures, to which our citizens are truly attached. Rather, we should work to preserve them.

To make the EU more effective and efficient, we need to come back to one of the founding principles of our EPP family, which is one of the fundamental principles of the Union itself. The principle of subsidiarity stipulates that decisions should be taken at the most appropriate level and as close as possible to citizens. As the recent Austrian presidency of the Council of the EU emphasised, this principle must be our compass when we discuss the future of Europe.

This is why we have decided that this issue of the *European View* should explore the concept of subsidiarity and its application to a variety of EU policies. I am glad we have been able to cooperate with the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). As the assembly of regional and local representatives, the CoR stands at the heart of the application of the principle of subsidiarity in the EU. It is therefore not surprising that the CoR played an important role in the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and Doing Less More Efficiently, which presented its report on 10 July 2018. The article by Reinhold Lopatka, a member of the Austrian National Council and of the task force, helps us understand the proposals set forth in this report. Due to the institutional setting in many member states, regional and local entities are an essential cog in the wheel when it comes to implementing EU directives, and adapting them to local needs and specificities. For this reason, we are happy to be able to include articles by Michael Schneider, President of the EPP Group in the CoR and State Secretary for Federal and European Affairs in the government of Saxony-Anhalt; Alberto Núñez Feijóo, President of the Autonomous Community of Galicia; Wim Van de Donk, King's Commissioner for the Province of North Brabant; and Olgierd Geblewicz, President of the West Pomerania region of Poland. Their contributions shed light on the current situation regarding the principle of subsidiarity in various regions across Europe. The articles by Federico Ottavio Reho and Žiga Turk look at subsidiarity from a more theoretical perspective, analysing and conceptualising the principle itself. Jolyon Howorth's contribution approaches subsidiarity from a different angle, considering it in connection with the development of European defence.

The articles by Paul Butcher and Simona Pronckutė and by Theodore Pelagidis and Michael Mitsopoulos both deal with issues basic to the principle of subsidiarity: the former, the need to involve citizens in the decision-making process; and the latter, the quest for more Europe. I wish to stress that even though subsidiarity may imply less Europe in some policies, the EU as a whole and its member states must respect the Union's founding values and principles, as established in the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. This is why I am happy to have Konstantinos Margaritis' contribution on the role of the Fundamental Rights Agency.

Finally, the application of the principle of subsidiarity does not prevent us from strengthening the EU's external action and developing a proper common foreign policy. The EU plays a crucial role in the world and especially in its own neighbourhood. This

role must be reinforced. Jean Crombois' article calls for reflection on one of the instruments of EU external action, the Eastern Partnership.

As we consider the principle of subsidiarity, we are drawn to reflect more deeply on the EU, its institutions and its policies. In rethinking Europe, we should not set artificial boundaries for ourselves. We should not hesitate to ask whether some steps went too far in the direction of centralisation or whether others might have been taken for egoistic reasons. This is the only way to move towards a federal EU that does not leave behind members, a Union all citizens can believe in and identify with.

Author biography



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