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# Changing around the Balkans – not only in the economy

One of the characteristics of our time is, that the changes are quicker and obviously more fundamental as we are sometimes aware of it. That is the tremendous request not only in politics but also in education. It is important, that we are able to handle them to find the right reactions and not to loose the perspective of our work. I may say even visions are necessary on this because otherwise we are not able to fix the role of Europe. Changing Europe does not mean only changes in the economy. For sure the economy is very important, because it is a basis nearly for everything, but what is going on, is even more impressive. I only want to fix some points:

* The importance of Europe will diminish. The reason for this is, that other parts of our world are coming up. Always the BRIC-states are mentioned, but it is not only this. It is in general Asia, South America and Africa. In comparison to some states like India and China Europe is smaller than them. The philosopher Peter Sloderdijk is saying that Europe is only a peninsula or an appendix of Asia. On this the vision Eurasia is sometimes mentioned as our future. I think, it is a very serious and interesting concept, because real boarders between Europe and Asia are extremely difficult to define. The most outstanding example is Russia. If you are standing on both sides of the Ural mountains you can not recognise, in which continent you are.
* An other argument are the changes concerning the population. We are getting especially in European over aged society, but also what is happening by migration changes also everything. The current economic situation is moving it forward, if you are looking to the fact, that Germany is looking for a labour force in Spain concerning the young generation being unemployed there.
* Also the cultural impact of this developments is very important. We only know the clashes and conflicts and defining them. Islamophobia is appearing and a kind of new nationalism. By that I think, the changes are going deeper and deeper.
* Last but not least: it has to be mentioned that we have a lot of crises: economic crises, banking crises, Europe crises and so on. Personally I am convinced that these are crises on politics and politicians, but that is no the reason to be desperate, because a crises by the original word on the old Greek language is a time where we have to judge and to decide. This might move us forward in the right direction.
* The reaction happening now is very ambivalent. On the one side there is a campaign for less Europe. On the other side especially if you are looking the banking and financial questions also the economy will need more Europe. There are a lot of discussions, why the European Union got the Peace Nobel Prize. I think, it is more justified for Europe than for Obama, because the contribution for the past, that Europe is a very peaceful region is very important, but it is also a challenge for the future and we have to fit in this role.

For “more Europe” there is no alternative. What do you want instead of the European Union. Great Britain can be the 21st State of the United States, the French can try to built up something in the western part of the Mediterranean Area, in Central Europe we can look for a follow up of the Habsburg Monarchy and so on. But these are all no solution for the presence and for the future. We have to position Europe and all its parts – also the Balkans - in the context of the global world. For sure it needs some time to move in this direction, but let us face it: the nation state is loosing importance. The nation state is still necessary, because we are organised on this basis, but we have to develop the right instruments. Until now international organisations are not fitting in to solve problems. You can see it for the United Nations concerning the crises in the Middle East and so on. But on the other side we have some international organisations like OSCE being very necessary. This is a great challenge for the Balkans, because we have to fit in in the right situation. So far a new “regionalism” is developing. Concerning the Balkans it means to take the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), which was founded in 2007 to take more serious. I think, this council is not able to solve the political problems, but it can create a lot of arrangements and institutions for better regional cooperation. It was already done with CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Association) with fighting criminality with a centre in Bucharest, with RACVIAC (Centre for Security Cooperation) concerning demilitarisation, on e-Cooperation, which is done by Slovenian Centre and so on and so on. A lot is to do. For example there is no really working Balkan airline system. The transport cooperation on the railways and especially on the River Danube is still missing. The EUSDR (European Union Strategy of the Danube Region) is a big challenge and a real change not only for water management and transport, but also for the economic development, tourism and competition.

Why is this regionalism necessary? For the Balkans and specially concerning the environment, essential what is done in the Middle East by the Arab Spring but the connections towards Russia, China, India and so on and so on.

The Chances are existing, because the Balkans are in the moment really stabile. For sure governments are changing, but the problems in Europe are elsewhere and not in the Balkans alone.

There is a stabile economy on low label, but the debts of the countries are not high as for example in South Europe or even in more developed countries in the western part. The EU enlargement is moving a little bit forward with Croatia and also with opening negotiations with other countries. This has to be pushed forward, because otherwise we are loosing time. The real danger for the Balkans is to be forgotten! The Balkans are not the periphery of the periphery of our world.

The Balkans are the real chance for the economy to offer opportunities for recovery. There are a lot of needs concerning infrastructure, investment, consumer goods and so on and so on. That is the reason, why a lot of enterprises are even on the economic crises, are not moving out of the region, because they are expecting a real push forward. It is also necessary for example concerning the different identities and the necessary reconciliations. In the Balkans we have an European Islam. It should be used, because otherwise more extremist positions will come up here. There is a real understanding in other parts of Europe missing, because otherwise we would have better handled the situation of the Bosnians, Macedonian and so on. Also practically a lot is to do. The second bridge over the river Danube between Romania and Bulgaria is opened, which is for sure necessary because on 470 km borderline there was only one bridge existing. This is a symbol. We need a bridge over troubled waters and I think that is also the function of ECPD to be a contributor on this subjects. So far we have to look very positively to the changes around the Balkans it is offering us a lot of chances.