

[European Union at the Crossroads. Interview with Prof. Jan Zielonka]

By Laura Leonardi and Sorina Soare

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Laura Leonardi: Hello and welcome to Florence! Let us start from your most recent publication in Italian, [Disintegrazione. Come salvare l'Europa dall'Unione europea](#). The point of departure is the assessment of the European crisis which you describe as being simultaneously a crisis of cohesion, imagination and trust. In line with this diagnosis, this interview aims to focus on the nature of this crisis, its causes, main actors, manifestations and, last but not least, its consequences. A first question that I would make concerns an analytical tool, a concept that you have used in order to define the European Union. More specifically, I refer to the EU encompassed as a neo-empire, a concept close, in my understanding, to that of Ulrich Beck, which also implies the notion of network. Do you think that the concept of neo-empire is still a useful concept for dealing with the current EU, in a radically changed context, the context you call disintegration?

Let me start with the concept of empire. I wrote my book on empire (Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union*, OUP, Oxford, 2006), at the time when Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grand wrote their book: *Cosmopolitan Europe*. They also introduced the concept of cosmopolitan empire. We did not know of each other, I never met them before. But the books came more or less at the same time, probably mine a bit earlier, but we had been unaware of each other. In fact, we think a little bit differently because Ulrich Beck is a sociologist, while I am a political scientist. He uses the lens of modernity, whilst I – a former student of Leszek Kołakowski who used to say “I do not know what modern is, how would I know what post-modernism is?” – prefer to look at history. So, in my conceptualization, there is a direct connection with medieval empires. The concept of medieval empire comes from the work of people like John Gerard Ruggie or Friedrich Kratochwil who also wrote about international relations, they both played with this medieval kind of paradigm. There were modern versions of this within Parag Khanna’s frame of interpretation, but he is not an academic, he is an intellectual, a public intellectual. So this version did not come from Beck but the argument is very similar to his. His cosmopolitan empire could as well be a medieval one. In my works, I use medieval only as a metaphor.

LL: How did you come to the concept of medieval empire?

Having started as an academic in Roman law and Roman Canon law, I knew Medievalism quite well, and I tried to look at this once again. When I started to play with this idea, I realized that this does not work because all these references (e.g. the vassal system, the fealty, etc.) did not really fit; the concept of medieval empire could not be used easily. So I used this as only a paradigm of the way I think that Europe was different. I took as a point of reference, the pre-Westphalia period, so to speak, but again Westphalia is a paradigm, because changes do not occur from a moment to another. It is not that from the treaty of Westphalia Europe has changed instantly; it does not work like that. It is a paradigm, a model. And this is how I was thinking about this. The argument at the time was: everybody talks about European integration as a kind of state building process. We got, first, treaties, and

common trade, common currency and even foreign policy and everything – even common borders, government and so on. But, when looking at Europe I saw the opposite process. Something different, developing in concentric circles. And I came to this because I tried to explain the enlargement. So starting from a focus on enlargement, I realized that this is what is going on. The enlargement reinforces, in fact, things which have always been there, so this is not that the enlargement, the last wave of enlargement, created this. It was always like this!

LL: And you used the concept of empire in order to explain the peculiarities of EU, didn't you?

My study of Europe's borders led me to the concept of empire. Empires have these soft borders which are more like zones rather than lines. Europe is not a kind of State where there is an overlap between cultural, administrative, legal and military borders. Europe is more like Empire where these borders do not overlap. Not empire because we are strong, like when President Barroso picked up the term and he thought "Oh we are strong here, like an American empire, we are now big boys, because we are an empire"! No, for me it was different, it referred to the way in which actorness is being constructed. Because, I believe that different actors have different kind of features, and not that it is important who the leader is, but how those characteristics make this leader act in a different way. If you have soft borders, it is not necessarily clear who is in, who is out, and where your interests are. You have totally different policies when you have hard borders and you try to do what Hirschman always said, close the exit, and keep the voice. It does not work like this in empires, because in empires there are those peripheries which have access to the decision-making and the resources at the center, and there are these kind of very complicated relationships, unequal but at the same time, these peripheries are very often sucked into the center. So, this is a different kind of politics, I elaborated this concept in several articles, about how it works and how it influences actorness. So, this is the story of the Empire, but this is also a kind of non-medieval Empire, because, in the Middle Ages, there was no empire like the Russian empire with its tsars, or the British empire of the 19th century. It was a different sort of concept. And I tried to find a new language, a new concept to talk about this Europe, because I thought that our discourse about the EU is totally misleading.

LL: What are the main difficulties the EU is facing?

The EU was for many years quite effective. Everybody thought it would be like this forever. Many countries put all their money into the basket of EU, Italy is one country, but Germany is, more importantly, another country, Poland is another country. They were all Euro-enthusiasts. The French were somehow skeptical, although in a different way than the Brits. But, on the whole, the Germans, the Italians, the Poles, they all put their hope in the EU. This is history now, because the EU stopped producing wonders. Enlargement was a success, but caused public disenchantment, and the subsequent European neighborhood policy was already a total failure. I just finished writing for a handbook of European neighborhood policy. It became a cottage industry; people are even writing handbooks on the European neighborhood policy now. But this neighborhood policy proved virtual! We were supposed to be surrounded by a ring of friends, and we ended up to be surrounded by a ring of fire, and instability, look at Northern Africa, look at Ukraine!

But this is only one of those failures the EU, they just stopped doing the things which everybody expected them to perform well in! Then, we had a refugee crisis.

LL: This, indeed, a huge topic on the EU agenda, but is it really a new topic?

Everybody thinks that the refugee crisis is new! It is just total nonsense, refugees ... I remember Brindisi in 1991. Do you remember the documentary *La nave dolce*, this ship coming to Brindisi from Albania. There were exactly the same scenes as we have seen on the Hungarian border, so the idea that this is new is just totally absurd.

We had this serious crisis already in the early 90s and we have done nothing.

What have we done?

We tried to pay out Muammar Gaddafi to control the migratory traffic in his country. Then it all ended! We bombed Muammar Gaddafi and created an even bigger mess, although with good intentions!

We never had a refugee policy, an immigration policy, we just thought we could get away with it!

Like we thought we can get away with all these unstable neighborhoods by giving up enlargement and basically offering them ... I do not know what was on offer, really. Because visa was not on offer, we were offering them some very symbolic things, it was not really money, no access to decision making, and what we were offering them was chiefly the high tech equipment to control borders.

This was the opposite logic from the undivided open Europe with its practices, and norms, and values, and so on.

And then, of course, came the financial crisis, which this time did not just affect the peripheries, but did affect member states, generating a profound crisis of cohesion! The EU was supposed to be a convergence machine making all these countries become the same. Now, we got the opposite!

And the worse thing is that we do not know what to do about these growing inequalities. I call this a crisis of imagination.

LL: Do you think that the EU can rise up to these challenges through reforms?

The EU is clearly unable to reform itself. Since the failure of the European Constitution, there is not even an effort to change something, and the failure of the European Constitution was not just the referendum, the failure of the European Constitution is that they produced a blueprint for change that was so poor! It did not satisfy anybody, not even the Eurocrats. So then they realized that there is a serious problem, and so if the institutions do not do what they are supposed to do, how are they supposed to generate prosperity, cohesion, and security of the borders. So what do you have this Union for?

LL: Is this a crisis of the mechanisms of legitimation?

You realize that the whole mechanism of legitimation was based on efficiency, not on participation, because there is no participation: where are the citizens in the EU? Nowhere!

There are European elections, but everybody knows that the European parliament does not function as a normal parliament. Then we also realized that with all this, the more federal we went, the more complicated the situation was. We were at least supposed to have a rule of law-based organization. The law was the trademark of the EU. The EU was supposed to be a community not of power politics, but of law. The whole history of the European integration was seen as an evolution from treaty to treaty. But now, we have learned that those treaties do not really count. You know that the decisions are being taken in Berlin, in totally informal manners. If you want to fix something, you have to go to Berlin, you do not go to Brussels. You know that basically crucial decisions are been taken by the Eurogroup. When Varoufakis asked them: "Can you tell me on which legal basis you want me to leave the room?", they said that there is no legal basis. This is an informal gathering, so ...

And the only treaty that we've got in recent years is the fiscal compact, which was basically imposed by Sarkozy, and Merkel, with no consultation. Berlusconi is not one of my favorite politicians, but he described this very well, about how he was confronted with the fiscal compact, and so on.

LL: So this a falling empire?

What I want to say is that we have a problem here! What has this to do with the Empire? Empires rise and fall. You can say: this is a falling empire, but this is not the point, because for me empire was never about the strength, empire was about the structure, the way you organize politics.

And here, some people believe that this is about going back to nation-states. Farage and Le Pen would tell you this!

But this is silly, these nations cannot do what they were doing before. They were transformed by membership in the EU. One of my former students wrote a wonderful book, Chris Bickerton (*European Integration: From Nation-States to Member States*, Oxford University Press, 2012), about how nation-states were transforming into member states, and what does this imply, or how much they are different. But technology was an even greater agent of change undermining nation-states' capacities. This does not mean that states disappear. No, it does not, but it means that there are other actors, and states actually are not so efficient as other actors can be. You can see, for instance, how skillful NGOs can be in using Internet, how cities became mega cities, and became leaders in generating innovation and growth. States fare poorly in comparison.

But then it is not like cities will take over from state! Nonsense because you have very strong cities while others are weak! You have the same with regions, the same with states, some are semi-imperial states like Germany, and others semi failed-states like Greece or Cyprus. It became much more complicated. Which brings you more than ever to this medieval Europe, where you have diversified centers of authority.

Sorina Soare: I can build upon your last comment! You have spoken, indirectly at least, about the enlargement fatigue that we can see, particularly in relations with the Western Balkans. And I was wondering if you can elaborate on the relationship, for example, between the Greek crisis and enlargement in the Balkans, considering that Greece was for those countries a model I would say, one of those orthodox countries that succeeded in the democratization process, one of those orthodox countries that succeeded in becoming a member state, and now this is lost, everything, or almost everything. Moreover, part of the literature explained the success of enlargement in relation to a rational allegiance of the candidate states to the European project, by saying "Yes, we accept all the sacrifices, because the reward is appealing, the membership is appealing". Is the EU membership still appealing for you, in particular in the Western Balkans, and not only, I have in mind also Moldavia, Ukraine, Georgia ...

Well, I think first of all that membership is not really an offer for them.

So, it is difficult to say whether it is appealing, sometimes you cannot get something you may find appealing. Look at the irony of the situation if you are a Ukrainian for instance ... Ukraine is the only country where people were prepared to die for Europe.

Not just for an association agreement with the EU ... But what they got in return is disappointing ...

I think that current Member States are not sure if there is still really something for them in the EU project! And I have no doubt that the current government in Britain, and the current government in Poland, those which I know very well, are happy that there is trade within the EU, and that is fine, but for the rest, they think that they can do it better themselves. In my view they are naïve in this, because exactly they have too much trust in the nation state, but having said that, I cannot say that the EU can do much good these days. EU leaders meet regularly, but they hardly solve any problem. In fact, they are busy cleaning up the mess they created themselves.

The refugee crisis is a beautiful example of this, it was Viktor Orbán who was implementing rules of Schengen, and Merkel who broke the rules of Schengen! This tells you something about these rules about how much they were appropriate to the situation we found ourselves in, and which was fairly predictable.

SS: Are all the member states behaving in the same way? Is the nation state the homogenous aspiration for all the 28 MSs?

They may think ok, the nation state might not be perfect, but it is still better than a dysfunctional EU! This is, of course, more difficult for states like Italy, or for states like Germany. There is something to do with the past, both in Italy and Germany you are not supposed to talk about national interests, because this is about the past! Then you start talking about national interest, but it is framed within the European interest. For Germans, it is particularly difficult, because they ended up in the position of emperors really. It is not like Germans want to decide about everything, I have the feeling. But this is where everybody goes if they want to fix something. They are the only leader of Europe, actually.

Because of the size, the success and the strength, they are in position to do so. They now think very seriously about how to handle this predicament. They handled it in a very pragmatic way. I talked to the Germans during

the crisis, many times. They always said Europe, Europe, Europe. But if you ask them what they mean for Europe, you mean the European Council? "No", they said. "You mean the 28 member states"? "No", they answered! "The European Commission?" No again, "the Commission is completely out of touch!" "The European Parliament, then?" "No, no Bundestag won't take it seriously"

So, what do you mean by Europe? The European Commission? No, this Junker is irritating like Barroso before him. So what does Europe mean? "Well, we are pragmatic people, we are doing it with those that are willing and able. Depending on the issue, depending on the circumstances, you cannot do it with all of them. And then we ask the Commission to just basically monitor those things or to implement those things, that is all".

SS: This is not really in the treaties, is it?

This is perfectly rational, what they do. But this is not Jean Monnet Doctrine you know, this is not what the Union signed up for! I call it a Donald Rumsfeld doctrine!

SS: Can you elaborate on what this means exactly?

You remember with NATO, once Rumsfeld came with this idea "Mission defines coalition". This is what Rumsfeld was telling the members of NATO. We will work choose our partners depending on the mission, we will not meet with you guys each time and ask for agreement of everybody. This is what the Germans do, but they have no other option in my view, because EU institutions have just become dysfunctional. And nobody knows how to fix them, nobody does. And even if they would do something that everybody agrees should be done, like stop the European Parliament travelling between Strasbourg and Brussels, the silliest thing you can imagine, but still, even if they would fix these things, they would not improve much. So this is where we are.

The problem is not "What is there for the prospective members?". The question is "What is there for the current members?". You see what I mean, because prospective members, they will always believe: "ok, virtual membership is better than no membership", but that's not the issue, here. Of course they would rather get a bad deal, but no deal is even worse, to be forgotten is even worse...

SS: Well, we have Russia there ...

For some of them yes, but what kind of alternative is Russia? I mean, it's totally unpredictable. They can switch the policies from one day to the other with no reason. Because they do not have an economic logic, so everything depends on the leader, he decides, one day he is the biggest friend of America, the other day he is the biggest enemy of America, he is of his own making. So I do not think Russia is really an alternative. Russia can offer you some oil and gas, but not an economic or democratic paradigm you can benefit from.

However, countries may fall in Russian arms because they just do not really have a choice.

If the EU just does not do anything for them, it only imposes conditions, and gives nothing in return, while Russia just does even small things, and Russians have their people there: they have a network and it works.

In this sense they are an alternative, but even Belarus clashes with Russians! They just do not want to be in their pocket! Lukashenka is not really in love with Russia! He wants to be in union with Russia, and then he changes his position the next day because he cannot stand it anymore! If Belarus under Lukashenko cannot be a partner for Russia, who can? Let's face it!

This is the dilemma ... there is no alternative, for most of them.

Look at Turkey, what is the alternative for Turkey?

I mean, the alternative is that they would become themselves an independent power! Independent! But they are surrounded by instability. They have instability at home. They have a very centralized autocratic government which is less and less in control. What is their alternative?

SS: According to your comments, the international relations we used to know are changing! But the change is only international or is it also at domestic level?

We should not only be thinking in international political terms. We should also think in domestic terms. This is what people very often forget to do, because everything which is happening internationally has roots in different ideological, economic and social trends in Europe. That is very important to understand! This does not come only from international power politics! So the current situation was largely driven by domestic politics, which are transnational too, because all of these countries have basically transnational interactions. Not just because they trade, but because they have smugglers, criminals, migrants moving all the time. All these things, member states do not really have under control.

Moreover, it is not enough that you are successful! Poland is a very good example. Economically speaking, it was one of the most successful European countries. Over the last 10 years they have had growth over 20%. Last year, Polish people elected a government that may destroy this success. Why is it so? Because growth was not divided fairly, because there was a lot of arrogance of power in the older elites. So you have all around Europe antiestablishment parties gaining ground, becoming stronger and stronger, but the problem is that all those parties do not know what they want, except getting into power. They do not have the paradigm to replace the current consensus. They have no vision of workable democracy or capitalism. They promise social justice by they do not know how to provide it in modern capitalism which is transnational, and not really controlled by states.

So this is where you should look: at the roots of those things! Not just at EU studies, at what is conditionality, what is compliance and so on. I do not want to say this is unimportant, but this is totally marginal, in my view.

SS: What was the major strength of the EU project?

The major strength of the EU was its image: people wanted to be like the EU, because it was successful, it was economically vibrant, and it was peaceful, so people wanted this. And if they could not join it, they wanted to imitate it. Even Putin in certain moments wanted to imitate it. But it did not turn out this way.

LL: If we talk about peace, about the peace project, the EU as a completed, successful outcome and as such a successful setting for solving conflicts and generating peace, is this project still valid or did it also fail? I mean, it has been successful for a while, but now, at this stage in which the economic prosperity is less and less visible, the ability to provide stability, and more precisely to ensure wealth for all, inclusion for all, is falling apart. What is happening? Because this was a very important linkage, the European identity was about peace, peace among Europeans: this was definitely the case for older generations!

I do not think so! There was much less integration in the security field than in the others. Let us face it; this was not the primary field of integration, and we have to be careful here, it is not like peace in Europe was only because of integration. It is not like economic growth was due only to integration! But having said that, it is difficult to just write European history about peace and growth, about the rule of law without taking into consideration integration. So, in my view, there are no doubts that there was an important contribution. First between Germany and France, for instance, very important indeed. But then, later, for Central and Eastern Europe. You have a good example here: how to integrate them and pacify them in the way that you basically make also conflicts between them much less serious. So, there was certainly a contribution here, but again it was not necessarily because of institution building. If you trade with each other, you communicate with each other, you do business with each other, you do not think about attacking each other. But, let's face it. Germany and Britain before the First World War were also very integrated, yet Germany decided to go to war. So it is not like this, that integration is enough! But we also have to understand that this process of peace was also linked to modernization as other issues became more important for those countries. Other ways of solving problems and conflicts were adopted because if territory is no longer so important for your economic growth then you do not try to just occupy other countries, what for?

Right, you do it differently, and it was also like that throughout history too. I always say that even when territorial acquisition was still important, this was not always acquired by military aggression. In the Middle Ages it was usually acquired by marriages. So there are different ways of achieving your objectives, the same in contemporary Europe.

LL: Is this somehow connected to the failure of EU foreign policy?

The EU really never had a real foreign policy and even less the security policy. In the late 1990s the EU decided to have 60.000 soldiers, the so called Helsinki Headline Goal. This has never materialized. So this thinking about the EU as a normal security actor, is just rubbish, in my view. But the foreign policy was a different type, so the foreign policy was largely external trade policy. Trade gave the EU a lot of influence on other countries, because nobody could ignore such a trading giant like the EU. Then they put conditions: "if you want to trade with us, you have to adopt our regulatory proposals". And those norms and rules were very much constraining in terms of sovereignty for various countries across the world. Because you can say for instance "ok, if you want to trade with us you have to adopt certain environmental standards, or protect laborers" but this for countries which are poor and want to develop, this is the only way they can make the product cheaper. They cannot pay environmental protection because how else they would compete with us, developed countries, when are they going to catch up with us, you see what I mean?

LL: It is an issue of power politics?

It was about power politics, but of a different sort. There was a larger policy, which was yet another one, or a different type of power politics, the enlargement policy. It was not very pleasant to meet all these conditions, you know, of the EU, you had to put up and shut up, that's it. So it was a power politics, it worked when the EU could offer access to its resources and in case of the enlargement also access to its decision making, then it worked. But when the EU was much more protectionist, in global trade, when it wanted to export rules, but it was not offering access to its market, then it didn't work, then those countries rebelled in recent years. Why Singapore issues were never adopted in global trade negotiations, because they thought "Ok you want us to adopt all these rules, but you don't open your markets sufficiently". Then with neighborhood policy, which replaced enlargement policy, it was the same, you want to export your rules, but you don't give us access to your resources and decision making, so this is where it became a problem. This vision of the open Union became less and less credible.

And then, when the Union started to violate the norms they were preaching to the others, then they've lost also legitimacy to export their norms. Because how can you promote democracy, all over the world, if you have fascist parties in your Parliaments, or how can you promote freedom of the media, with people like Berlusconi? How can you promote EU laws if you basically don't observe your own treaties? When power politics takes over, informal politics take over law binding policies. So, what kind of legitimacy do you have?

And then what about North Africa... it is really sad. I went to Tunisia last year, just before the first terrorist attacks, I talked to people there, who would say "what about the EU? They only talk about Coastal guards!" This was the only thing the EU was interested in! So what is there for those countries? And it was the only democracy by then, after the Arab Spring.

And then came the terrorist attacks, because these guys with guns are much more organized and they are there! Where was the EU then? They were making beautiful speeches, but looked completely out of touch! In Tunisia the President of the European Council said: there could have been Arab Springs without the EU but there cannot be Arab summer without the EU. If you read their speeches, you don't know whether to cry or laugh. So what I call a civilizing mission became totally empty, and this is what has happened, so the way in which EU generates security, trade, communication, cooperation, and gradual integration has become hollow, it has become an empty slogan.

And then we can ask ourselves why it has become so, right?

Some people would tell you this project was never meant to work, others could tell you that the European

civilian power cannot succeed in an uncivilized world. And we were confronted with an ever more brutish and anti-western world. People began to think that the EU was made for the good weather but not for the bad weather.

The same for the euro. The euro was made for the good weather but not for the bad one.

We can only speculate about why it was so.

SS: How can you explain this global failure?

In my view the EU was unable to adjust to change. In the past three decades we witnessed three “unbounding” revolutions in geo politics, economics, and communication. The EU was not equipped to respond to those changes because when things started to go wrong, we abandoned everything we preached was good for us and others, we just became very much inward looking, selfish, egoistic towards the refugees or debtors. Poor people, especially young unemployed ones were just ignored. This was partly ideological: a mixture of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism imported from America. We started to say that we cannot afford social policy! We even went further and argued: no, you don’t give money to the poor, because they are lazy. The ambition to replace the Washington consensus by the Stockholm consensus and not the Washington consensus was abandoned. You can see the same in the field of foreign policy: we were preaching human rights and then we learned that we were torturing prisoners.

So...

SS: Only one question about Great Britain and Europe, what is your interpretation of future scenarios, about the referendum and everything?

Anything goes! Cameron has not proposed a reformed package to improve Europe. He has done it for his Conservative Party’s constituency. He said he can get a deal with others, because there are other countries that may like to constrain for instance freedom of labor and social policies more, but these changes might not be spectacular enough to make Eurosceptics happy, so anything goes, I don’t know.

SS: An open bet!

An open bet! It is all out of control, but this is not only Britain. We don’t know if Merkel will survive the current situation in Germany and you could think there is no other politician who is more stable than Merkel. I go even further. I fear the next country which will see a kind of xenophobic turn ... will be Germany, because they won’t be able to cope with all the migration on their heads and we have already seen the hysteria after Cologne which should have been first of all treated by the police, as a form of hooliganism. It should not have been covered up. What you see is that a very worrying but relatively small episode just explodes, and it explodes because of the incompetence of the authorities and the general public’s anxieties. And I see it in Poland also. There is hysteria even greater than in Germany, and there are no refugees at all in Poland, so what we are talking about? The question is where these Poles took their language from?

LL: Before finishing this challenging discussion, I would like to go beyond the rather pessimistic picture that emerges from our conversation considering that in your most recent volume translated into Italian there are also very optimistic insights: the vision of neo-integration, if we want to call it like that, or anyway those references to a new structure that is emerging which is made possible by a functional integration. Accordingly, the main actors are neither the national states, nor a super-entity as the current European Union or any institutional setting associated to a super-state. The constellation of actors changes according to the areas of expertise, the areas of intervention, the policies under discussion. Hence there is a possible way out of the current deadlock. It is what you call a polyphonic Europe. I am particularly curious to hear your comments in this last part of our conversation on why are you taking about a crisis of imagination? How do you imagine this polyphonic Europe?

How can a polyphonic Europe react to those challenges that neither the EU nor nation states can deal with, for instance the

immigration crisis and those flows of immigrants which are for the most part asylum seekers? The state of emergency is there and how do you think this situation should be dealt with, what are the answers that a polyphonic Europe can give? This is definitely a very challenging topic.

You know, this is very simple. I know nothing about the future, nobody does. The only thing we know certainly about the future is that we will die. Of course we can argue about whether we resurrect or not, it depends on our religious beliefs. In political science we can only talk about different scenarios and various models. One scenario is that we go back to the future, to nation states and conflicts, and all these elements, a new version of what we have seen in the first part of the 20th century. The second is that we'll just reinforce European institutions, that we will build a European federation.

And if none of those extremes work, we have to ask what then?

I have problems with the Federation scenario, because this would mean that nation states will commit public suicide if they will just say ok, we delegate all the important powers to the EU at a time when EU doesn't function. They haven't done it at the time when it functioned well, they haven't done it at the time when unemployment between Germany and Spain was more or less the same, why would they do it now when everybody is fed up with the Union, when there are those who earn money from the crisis and those who lose money from the crisis? I just don't see it as a workable proposition, they all say "Oh yeah, the crisis will make us stronger", but I do not believe in that. If Europe's leaders would make a step towards federation the people would object. .

I have nothing against the federal scenario, I think it would be nice to have it, but I just don't see it happening, I haven't seen it before, and I certainly don't see it now.

This is based on the belief that if things are so bad, then finally everybody, leaders and population, would realize that there is no other way. No, history teaches me that if things are really bad, people are not going to throw more money on failed projects. I think those endorsing this scenario are just lacking imagination.

LL: What about the other scenario?

Why am I not convinced about the back-to-the-future scenario?

Partly because I don't think Europeans really want to start fights with each other. If you read the Polish press today, look at the cover pages and you shall see pictures of the Germans invading Poland, with Schulz, president of the European Parliament who criticizes Poland and some other European official, another German, with their faces in the Wehrmacht uniforms and so on, all of them attacking Poland, so you can say this is the scenario.

But this has nothing to do with the reality ... neither the Germans want to intervene in Poland, nor the Poles want to have fights with Germans. There are those idiots, public opinion makers! They did it in Greece too!

The reason I don't believe in this totally negative scenario is that people in general don't want that; there are these political entrepreneurs who think they can sell more newspapers, get elected to some Councils or so, but this is not what Europeans want.

And the second reason is because those nation States which were drivers of this competition in the past are not as powerful they used to be. I mean, they have been basically destroying their armies over the recent years, with only few exceptions.

LL: Are there alternatives?

I think the alternative is that, if you forget about this crazy political theater which we have in most of our countries, you see that business is really trying to work normally despite those politicians messing up. Actually a lot of other actors, cities, regions, NGOs, businesses, they all take things in their hands, because those nation states, political theatres which used to be legitimate, are just totally inefficient.

This means that the world we used to know with nation states negotiating, competing, clashing, it has become increasingly an irrelevant reality, a reality of the past. And life goes on, people have to earn money, make sure their children have a job, a shelter and so on. And this is why I believe that those other actors are taking over

from States, not necessarily dumping States or eliminating national democracies, but doing all things separately. So these things will be more complicated for some time, before they get shaped. But I don't assume that this is the residue of chaos and anarchy, because it very much depends on your perception. If you are a centralist person, you think that everything that does not follow your order is already anarchy, but I don't think this way, I believe that spontaneous movements are very often more effective than those commanded from faraway centers which do not know what is really suited for people in local communities. I also believe that integration can develop through functional lines rather than territorial lines. People in one profession understand themselves better. And I also don't believe that democracy is only about rules, it is also about participation. You have to give people the ability to shape things and not just procedures and so on, and those should be more local rather than central. So I call it polyphony, in the sense that what I see today is a cacophony, and I want to say that it is spontaneous to create music of various sounds which come together somehow. What I want to say is that we should open up ourselves to more diversified, pluralistic, spontaneous inputs of various actors.

And this is my hope, that this will generate something. It will be a little bit messy but not destructive, I hope.

So this is how I come with this vision, because the two others I don't find credible enough, but you can say this is also not credible. Give me a better one! And not just a different scenario, it does not matter if you call it cosmopolitan or medieval, I don't care about this, but give me another option. My vision is actually not really original. I didn't invent this. I just took it from other disciplines. I didn't invent any word here, you know, but in European studies we only discuss about the European Federation of Nation States, but I see a lot of other actors, and I give the example of the cities which now generate from 80 to 90 % of economic growth and where do they have a space on the European table, of decision making? At these decision making tables you have countries which had either failed like Greece or are so small like Estonia, that they don't match cities like London or Hamburg.

What is their legitimacy? Well, you can also ask, what is the legitimacy of nation-states. Look at dysfunctional parliaments, parties, constitutions. Cities are not doing much worse in the field of democracy.

So these things are changing and I expect they will change even more in the future. Some people believe that there is no change, I believe there is change, some people believe that anything deviating a little bit from the pyramid structure brings chaos and anarchy; I don't believe this means chaos or anarchy, just that a little bit of more imagination is needed.

LL: If you allow me, I would like to finish this conversation building upon what you have just said about the role that cities and other organizations, for example business, labor, NGOs, all this multiplicity of actors may have. It made me think of a speech held by Václav Havel in the European Parliament back in 1994. He was asked to talk about the European identity and European values. He had been, also in my view, a little bit detached, even ironic in talking about these issues because he had not forgotten that Europe has not always expressed positive values. For him values were solidarity, social justice, and the rule of law, and above all civil society. In his opinion, this is the value, the space to be given to civil society, the value we have to invest in the European arena. I want to ask you what is your opinion on this issue? Are there possibilities to broaden, to reinforce the space for civil society, is it possible for institutions to allow a plural civil society?

Yes and no! I'll tell you why! I knew Havel, I knew him personally, so please don't misunderstand me.

I think he was right, but the notion of civil society in 1994, before the Internet revolution, was different. This is exactly what we have to understand, that civil society is changing with the world we are living in, because the Internet revolution is not only a revolution of communication, but also of business since a lot of the financial transactions, the global transactions were not possible before Internet revolution. Hence we will have new notions of civil society very soon. This brings me to the meeting with Havel's brother, a few months ago in Sydney. He is a specialist in robotics; he migrated after 68 to California, and started to work on robotics. Basically the scientists' prediction is that while the last 20 years were dominated by internet, the next 20 years will be dominated by robotics. We had a very interesting conversation with John Keane and the brother of Havel on what society we will get when we will be becoming increasingly dependent on robotics. And some of these robots are created with increasingly human features, because this is where it is headed, and not just artificial intelligence, but a kind of human intelligence. There are even kindergartens for robots in California today. So robots are not just

programmed, they are developing their own intelligence.

Why am I saying those things? I'm saying those things just to show you that civil society will change depending on many things, not only on the new notion of what is justice, for instance, but also on the new relationship we have thanks to technology. It has some advantages, but also creates a lot of real challenges. So, this is something which is not easy to evaluate. It is important to understand what we are talking about when we are referring to civil society. Do not forget that the notion of civil society has already changed after 9/11, for instance, we haven't behaved so civilly ... and society has changed too. So it is not enough to have these buzz words, like identities, society, nation.... because they all constantly change with everything that happens all over the world, according to not only human developments, but also technological ones.

