

EUROPEAN UNION AFTER 50 YEARS OF EXISTENCE

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Abstract

The unification process has been the central point of the european political and economic history in the second half of the last century. The advances made seem today impressing and impossible to imagine only a few years ago: peace and stability have been consolidated; economic growth has continued; european citizens' standard of living has been substantially improved

A series of events have celebrated the end of 50 years of existence of European Union in March.

Leaders of european countries have met and signed the Berlin declaration, which draws the main steps for continuing the european construction necessary in order to achieve the so much needed prosperity, peace and solidarity.

European commissioners have used this opportunity to point out both the evolution of European Union and the challenges they will face in their field of responsibility.

European youth have joined in Rome to celebrate the event.

Experts in economy, politicians, artists, scientists and professors have participated to activities organized for this celebration, to emphasize the european trends, Europe's participation to global and regional economic and political processes.

Booklets of tens and hundreds of pages have been printed and distributed to those interested, describing the main steps in European Union's history.

Eurosceptics, who are not so optimistic about european evolutions, made their voice loud and clear these days. Each of them tried to draw in his/her own way another possible path, failing to succeed in circumscribing it in the complex processes of globalization and regionalization of economic and political phenomena.

What can be said, based on the achievements of european construction, is the fact that European Union represents a unique experience of peaceful integration and cooperation among former rival and competing states.

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The common currency is a historical success and common policies defend the principles and interests of Europe.

European Union is today the world most important economic actor, as well as the biggest donor for development and the most important supplier of international aid.

Also, European Union plays a crucial role in spreading stability in its neighborhood, especially through the enlargement process toward the central european and mediteranean countries.

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As far as external relations are concerned, Europe makes significant steps toward a European foreign policy.

These days many words have been said and written about what is Europe today, but the topic is far from being exhausted. Therefore, I do not intend either to make an exhaustive analysis of the 50 years of history in Europe, but I will remind only certain moments that I consider relevant.

Thus, after signing the Treaty at March 25, 1957, member countries play the most important role in accelerating the process of economic integration across Europe.

In 1968 a custom union is achieved among member countries. This stage represents the liberalization of intra-union trade, by eliminating custom duties and non-tariff barriers. Thus, a common custom tariff has been adopted and the germs of a single trade policy vis-à-vis third countries arise.

Indeed, in 1973 trade policy is transferred from the national competence of member states to the level of European Commission. This stage had a huge importance in the future economic evolution of Europe, because it led to the adoption of approaches specific to trade negotiations, both with the rest of European countries and in the field of multilateral trade relations.

In this period European Union has been constrained to solve certain structural economic problems. Thus EU has regulated its trade relations with third countries in the trade with textile products, supporting the Multifiber Agreement within GATT and bilateral Agreements with exporting countries.

True to the market mechanisms, the European Union did not hesitate for a moment to adopt and to put into use the Davignon Plan of restructuring of the ferrous metallurgy industry, so that even in this field, the quotient between the offer and the demand of goods would assure a solid development of this economic sector. This process implied, starting with 1978, the financial sustaining for the limitation of common production capacities and the reduction of imports in order to assure the necessary conditions for a real competition.

The creation of the common agricultural policy, which spun from the principle of assuring minimum guaranteed yields for the European farmers, has been a difficult process, requiring complex negotiations at community level and especially at international level, as a follow-up of the massive subventions introduced for the European producers as well as for sustaining exports.

The implementation of the common policies in the fields of trade and agriculture were followed by the implementation of a set of rules and common policies concerning competition and transports.

The passage of the European Community to a new level of integration, named the "common market", was marked through the process of transposing at community level the rules from the different economic sectors.

The nomination of Jacques Delors as the President of the European Commission stimulated the deepening of the intra-European integration process, embodied by the creation of the Economic Union and then by that of the Economic and Monetary Union.

Thus, in 1986, the European Single Act is signed, with the objective of implementing the European single market, in the perspective of the year of 1993, which was aiming to put into use the four fundamental liberties of movement, notably the free movement of goods, of persons, of capitals and that of services. At the same time, the single currency

also became a reality, which brought Europe today in a position in which it can assume new economic, social and political challenges.

The Lisbon Agenda is the document that clearly defines the necessary actions that must be carried out in order to help transform the European economy into the most competitive economy at international level.

The registered progress concerning the European economic integration process has triggered important legislative modifications, including the basic treaty.

All the mentioned aspects underline the efforts imposed by the European construction process and the political will of the member states in order to achieve the new European architecture, which implied profound changes at the intra-European level as well as that of relations with third parties. All this transformed the European Union into a credible entity with great possibilities of consolidation and development.

The fact that history has temporarily divided Romania from the other part of Europe made us really forget our traditional economic relations with Europe?

The answer is categorically NO.

In order to demonstrate this affirmation, I will present the evolution of the juridical relations between Romania and the European Union. Even if it is a type of presentation very rarely used, I have chosen it in this paper for I think that it is highly relevant in order to underline the important fact that, economically, at least, we have never detached ourselves from Europe even if we could have done so.

In 1969 appear the first contacts with the recently created European Economic Community, for the sector regulation of reciprocal trade with a series of agriculture products. Not very long afterwards, the European Union recognizes Romania's status as a developing country, a fact that enables Romanian products to enter the European market benefiting from a series of custom facilities.

Starting with 1976, Romania regulates its textile products trade in relationship with the European Union through the periodical signing of a series of bilateral agreements of voluntary restraint. The reorganization of the common ferrous metallurgy industry and the Romanian export potential in this economic sector set the need for a definition of the bilateral juridical basis and the signing, starting with 1978, of the bilateral arrangements of voluntary restraint of the Romanian exports.

In 1981, Romania chooses a global approach of its relations with the European Union. Thus, besides the Agreement on industrial goods, the Agreement concerning the creation of a mixed intergovernmental commission is signed. In this way, the dialogue between the European Union and Romania is institutionalized. In other words, Romania de facto recognizes the existence of the European Union as an economic entity.

Through these efforts, Romania became the first and only COMECON member to reach this point in its relationship with the European Union.

On these basis negotiations regarding the signing of an Agreement on trade, economic and commercial cooperation between Romania and the European Union were started. Immediately afterwards, in 1987, Romania got the historical chance to become the first COMECON member who could establish diplomatic relations with the European Union. Only the limitations imposed by the Romanian political regime of that time, a regime that did not foresee Europe's evolution, caused us the loss of the respective opportunity. The issue was nevertheless brought up again in 1990 and concretized, which enabled us to move onto the negotiations for the European Association Agreement and

from there on, onto the long road of accession to the European Union.

It is thus easy to see that the European Union has always represented for Romania a significant partner while our country has permanently had the sentiment of belonging to the European values.

It is why, once adhered to the European Union, we must feel Romanian at home in all regards in Europe, and try to make the best of the advantages brought by the European construction. The need to operate with the European economic mechanism is great and we must guarantee the correct functioning of these mechanisms, which are not only European, but have an international vocation as well.

We must be at ease with the rules of the game, to set specific priorities and assure a professional representation in the dialogue with the European partners, enabling thus not only the turning account of the opportunities that come from the accession to the European Union but also the concrete contribution to the continuation of this process of European construction.

We cannot and we must not remain stuck in sterile and obsolete discussions about the costs of integration, when in fact the costs of non-integration in the European Union would have been, without a doubt, much greater.

Also, I consider it normal for the euro skeptics to look upon the European Union in its dynamic and see that in its 50 years of history, the number of member states has continued to grow, presently reaching 27.

They can thus see that the process of the European construction had the European Union as its major pillar and that it has been achieved in only one direction.

The fact that not one of the member states that make up the European Union has solicited to leave this family and the reality that all countries that have adhered have known important economic growth with benefic effects on the standards of life of their citizens, can represent the most eloquent answer concerning the benefic role in belonging to this entity.

At this anniversary moment, we must be conscious of the fact that we belong to the European Union and that we live in a region of peace, of democracy and of cooperation, with great hopes for sustainable economic growth and the positive evolution, therein, of our life standards.