

Schuman Declaration 2.0

European solidarity cannot be safeguarded if constructive and communicative efforts are not made commensurate with the dangers that threaten it.

Seventy years ago, the foundation was build for an ever closer European Union. The Schengen area was created and borders were opened for people, goods and capital flows. Those of us born in the 90s or later, we did not experience inner European border controls. We could live, learn, work and travel within the European Union without second thoughts about changing currency, equal rights or health insurance. Since 2017, there aren't even roaming charges anymore. Except for the language, traveling the EU does not feel any different from traveling my own country. The EU has become my home.

Of course, European integration has never been a one way street. And European Policy making can appear quite complex, the EU being a new entity history hasn't seen before. There were set backs. Not few of them. One of the latest ones being the UK exiting the EU. Nevertheless, I always trusted that there is but one direction where we are headed: closer together.

For some time now, the world is facing a new threat. We live in times of uncertainty. We are all fighting an invisible enemy. All of a sudden, we find our selves in a situation where all borders are closed. Free movement of people has been deeply restricted. We, the European people, were asked to return to our home-countries. In a Union where we should all have the same rights, we are suddenly asked to turn back to our nation state. On the run within the European Union – a scary feeling. As the enemy is invisible, anyone is a potential threat. Although helpful for reducing the spreading of the virus for the time being, the perception of other human beings as a threat, especially from outside the hometown and home country, can be extremely dangerous. We cannot let that happen.

Europe has not been made at once. The Creation of the European Single Market has been a big step in European economic integration. Not only did it bring about the access to goods and services and the Euro as the single currency. The Common market also led to harmonized standards in occupational health and safety, environmental protection and social rights. But these were side-effects to the goal of establishing a Common market. Side effects to the economic integration. The current crisis demonstrates just that.

So what is the next step? We need a European plan how to get through this difficult times as a Union. Solidarity in supplying medical and financial help is of utmost importance. But what about a political Union? A political Union with a European perspective where member states consider the wellbeing of all European citizens to be the greatest good of all.

We could make a first step in that direction. As the restrictions are nationally / regionally loosened, opening the borders should be coordinated at European level. We also need a European narration. So far, media coverage is mostly centered on the own nation / region. There seems to be no European perspective. This doesn't help the solidarity within the EU. The idea that there is a common European crisis response and that the member states are willing to work together creates confidence and comfort.

The crisis we are experiencing might be going on for some time. While keeping physical distance, we should not consider people (nationally and internationally) as a potential threat, but as a potential partner / source of help.

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Annika Thies
European citizen