

Europe beyond the crisis: citizens and politicians with vision of 10 years ahead (radio broadcast)

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In today's feature on Radio Bulgaria under the project Interacting with the European Parliament, we offer you different opinions gathered in April in the heart of united Europe – in the building in Brussels of the only directly elected European institution – the European Parliament. There during a series of discussions and meetings, [the book Europe 2020 – civic vision](#) was presented. It contains the concluding remarks of a campaign entitled Interacting with the European Parliament that has lasted for over two years. Radio Bulgaria has been a media partner throughout the campaign that has been carried out by the European Institute, Portal Europe and the Centre for Policy Modernization.

Amidst a raging global economic and financial crisis in 2010, Europe has been compelled to find the most viable solutions to weather it. At the same time, Europe has had to shape its long-term visions about its own development not only in economic but also in social terms. In this context, one of the most topical long-term issues remains the enlargement of the European Union. How does the crisis affect this process?

Especially for Radio Bulgaria, [Diana Wallis](#), **Vice President of the European Parliament** gave the following answer to this question:

“It is clear the financial and economic crisis affects the union as much as it affects elsewhere. We have our problems in Greece but not only Greece. But a crisis normally, in my view, is something that helps people pull together in order to solve the crisis. And that to me is what Europe offers both for its members and both for those that want to join us. I mean that's clear from Iceland but it could also be clear elsewhere. Clearly, economic difficulties should not be the only reason that provokes a country to join us. I am a great believer and let's be optimistic that the crisis produces change and it can produce almost, in my view, a new dynamic to move forward. If it produces a response which means we close our doors then I think that would be very, very sad.”

In the context of the vision of Europe in 10 years' time, how do you see the possible accession of Balkan countries such as Albania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia?

“Well, clearly, we have the process with Croatia that is nearing completion, hopefully. From my own point of view, I would love to see all those countries almost come in together as it were and clearly Croatia will be the first but for the rest of them I think it is important that there is an element of balance that they do proceed. It is clearly going to be very difficult for some of the countries involved but all of them have that aspiration and we need to recognize it and we need to help them move on.”

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The new 10-year plan for growth and development of EU entitled Europe 2020 – strategy for an intelligent, sustainable and unifying growth has been crafted by the European Commission and is being currently debated throughout Europe. The following question however comes to the fore. Can EU strategically plan its development for an entire decade ahead when the ongoing economic and financial crisis makes the planning for even a week ahead all but impossible? It is obvious that EU citizens are concerned about their jobs, money and welfare as a whole today.

How does the strategy Europe 2020 look like in the eyes of **Mrs. Pascale Gruny, Chairwoman of the EP’s work group for the European Social Fund**, member of the Employment and Social Affairs Commission as well as of the Commission on Petitions. She has joined the presentation of the book in the European Parliament.

“Concerning the Strategy Europe 2020 I would say that I am quite satisfied with the goals that have been set in it,” says Mrs Gruny. “If one made a comparison between the goals of the European Social Fund and the goals set in the strategy, one would see a lot of similarities. The President of the European Commission Jos  Manuel Barroso has set up a goal of reducing the number of poor people by 20 mln. In the upcoming weeks we, the MEPs, expect an actual expression of the goals set in the strategy. In June, a special work group from the European Commission will present a report on the European Social Fund. I will sign in to participate in that presentation because it is good for MEPs to be involved in the crafting of policies in this particular field. EC representatives often attend our sittings in the European Parliament and this helps coordinate our activities.”

There is no doubt that nowadays European citizens want a stronger Europe which provides them with calm. There is also no doubt that this is a challenge for politicians and institutions to respond to such expectations. What is the conclusion that has been drawn in the book Europe 2020 – civic vision compiled by experts from the European Institute in Sofia?

“Being active on the part of citizens,” summarized **the director of the European Institute Lyubov Panayotova**. “This is the main conclusion of our book if I may put it in a few words. Being active is the driving force as well as cooperation between citizens and their national representatives in the European Parliament and not only the national ones.”

To the question how Mrs Panayotova sees Bulgaria in 10 years’ time, she answered the following:

“My dream is for Bulgaria to be an active member not only in the European Parliament but also in the different commissions and in the entire process of crafting the legislation which we think will be useful for the Bulgarian citizens. This must be made absolutely clear so that citizens are able to understand why there is exactly such process of making decisions and why certain policies that affect all 500 mln people who live in EU are agreed by all 27 member states, 26 without us.”

A group of **Bulgarian students** attended the presentation of the book Europe 2020 – civic vision in the European Parliament. After the discussion with MEP Pascale Gruny, this is what some of them shared about how they saw themselves in 10 years’ time.

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“In 10 years’ time I see myself having a well-paid job and good standard of living but it all depends on me, of course.”

“Well, perhaps having obtained a good education which I think only Bulgaria could provide me with. I think that if we the youth all leave the country and continue our education somewhere in Europe and never come back then there is no way for the country to develop. Even if we study abroad we must come back to help our country. In 10 years’ time I see myself as a doctor because this is what I want to study. However, the most important thing is always to come back to Bulgaria and contribute to its development.”

The vision of Europe’s future regards to a large extent its relations with third countries. In this sense is the question of Radio Bulgaria to the Vice President of the European Parliament, Mrs Wallis, about the possible future accession of Turkey as a full-fledged member of the European Union.

“I look at it in two ways. First of all, Turkey has been wanting to be associated with the EU or at least its predecessors since the time of the Treaty of Rome was signed. That’s a long time to be knocking on the door. And likewise, I feel that we should be clear with Turkey and we should treat Turkey like any other applicant. That means that if Turkey reaches the economic standards, the human rights standards, we should be going at a good speed. So I would be positive towards Turkey but clearly there are other voices that are more reticent. I believe that having Turkey as part of the European Union helps us, helps Turkey, helps that region of the world and it means that the European Union is not a rather exclusive Middle-European Christian club but something much more diverse. I think that is something much to be wished for.”

In a special video address on the occasion of the publication and presentation of the book Europe 2020 – civic vision in the European parliament, the **EP president [Jerzy Buzek](#)** said the following:

“This remarkable collection of proposals touches upon a concept which is very new to me – the concept of citizenship. To me, an active citizen is someone who does not take things for granted; who questions power; who takes an active role in improving the community of which he is part; and who respects the rules when they stem from real democracy.”

The vision of Europe is an ongoing one in whose crafting all citizens of united Europe as well as all listeners of Radio Bulgaria are invited to participate. This can be done at the project’s website at <http://parliament.europe.bg>, whose aim is to provoke the activeness of the citizens on all current issues related to Europe. On this website you can read the book Europe 2020 – civic vision as well as watch videos from the events in Brussels.

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