

The European Balcony Project

von Ulrike Guérot

Why the European Republic? *Res Publica Europa*? In a nutshell, the political paradigm we suggest is the following: We started off with a single market, then we got a common currency, but we are still missing a single democracy. We are taught to be citizens of the European Union, but actually, "citizens of the European Union" is a meaningless phrase. The EU legal community supposedly offers freedom of movement for everything. In reality, it is goods, capital and services, basically us as people in our factor as work, who are equal in front of the law. The only ones who are not equal before the EU now, in the European community, are the EU citizens themselves. We are still compartmentalized in legal containers as Finns, Germans, Portuguese, whoever. In regard to the things which are the most important things for the citizens, which are *le sacre du citoyen* to quote the famous French sociologist Pierre Rosanvallon, ? voting, taxation, social rights – the European citizens are not equal. If we were to be equal, we would build a European Republic ? equality before the law, *equum jus*. That is Cicero's definition of a republic. So the people who decide to create a community on the basis of equal law, they build a republic. In my book, *Warum Europa eine Republik werden muss*, I basically tried to pick up this heritage, which is a cultural heritage from Plato, Aristotle, Cicero to Kant and Rousseau. You cannot fall in love with a single market or a European currency. What we should do on this continent is to create a political unity which gives us – the citizens – the sovereignty of the political project we are in. If we want to have that, I am just suggesting, together with Robert Menasse, that the one market and the one currency must be embedded in one political democracy. Our suggestion for this is the European Republic, a democratic way to organize Europe based on legal equality of all European citizens. This is it, in essence. It would be very easy. We achieved a lot in Europe in the last 60 years.

Now the EU faces many challenges (e.g. populism and nationalism) but I think we should push the European project further and take it, in a way, out of the hands of the nation states, who do or do not do Europe, and bring it back to the citizens. This means as artists thinking about the linkage between citizens and sovereignty. Citizenship is the central topic that we have to strive for in Europe. One example: The Treaty of Maastricht of 1992 was supposed to give us a union of states and a union of citizens. If we had today a normatively valid European citizenship, the UK as a country could easily leave the European Union, but the British people would still remain European citizens. The fact that the European citizenship has no normative meaning, that is the problem for the British living on the continent, those who belong to the remain camp and want to be in. Thinking about what belonging really means, ? a sense of belonging as a European citizen to an entity like *Res Publica Europa*. Robert Menasse and I are working on a normative base, which is legal equality as a perspective for European citizens. This is the way to move us out of the crisis.

The European Balcony Project is a project to proclaim the European Republic on 10th November. Many big theatres like the Schaubühne in Berlin or the Burgtheater in Vienna are participating; as well as schools, youth groups, free artists and trade unions. Bert Brecht always said, theatre can shape the world. I am deeply convinced that we need to speak out. This is the theory of the speech act. This is what we want to do, we want to do a pan-European speech act. We want speak out on 10 November at 4pm and we proclaim the European Republic. Together with Milo Rau, we have written a manifesto, a very short text that has been translated in more than twenty languages including sign language. The idea is: you print it this out, you speak it out. We all want to be European citizens under the premises of equal law. We invite all theatres, artists, citizen to do this as a little act of ten minutes, it does not have to be long, but we invite every participant to add whatever performance – art, theatre, discussion – they want to do. Discuss the manifesto. It is free. Our aim is to do the speech act and, for the first time, horizontally unite European citizens on one single moment in time. Why 10th of November 2018? Hundred years ago, in November 1918, all these republics were proclaimed, the Bavarian, Austrian, Weimar, Hungarian Republic. Hundred years later we look back and we want to turn the past into the future. The European Balcony Project is about the emancipation of European citizens. 11th November is the end of the First World War. Combining these two dates, it gives us a new "Lieu de memoires", which could be that we turn dates of the past in a common date of the future. That is the idea.

European democracy on a new scale – what is the new scale, what does it want to point to? One sentence, which sounds radical, but is very important. We went back to the proclamations 100 years ago. They were pretty radical! *Die Wittelsbacher Monarchie ist abgeschafft*, the Wittelsbach monarchy is abolished! We tried to find the tone of what they did hundred years ago, to apply it to what is the moment in time now. One of the sentences in the manifesto goes like this: The European Council is abolished. That is what corresponds to the idea that if we want to be European citizens on the basis of equal law, if we want a fully fledged democracy and if we want parliamentarization and division of power, there is no such thing as a European Council that should govern us. I do not know whether you have followed what Varoufakis has been doing, there is this concept of Colin Crouch that the EU is a post-democracy: You can always vote, but you have no choice. That is what the EU did to the Greeks. They voted a lot, and had a referendum but at the end of every vote always came the memorandum of understanding. Now we are struggling with Italy, which is a

similar case. I am not a big fan of Salvini, but there is this thing that Habermas calls executive federalism. He means that there cannot be an EU commission which runs the Italian budget. Because that is the most noble right of parliament. There cannot be another executive body that controls this budget. What we are experiencing here, this week, is an arm wrestling between the Italians and the commission over who will win on the project thing. I do not know what will happen, but it points to precisely this democratic deficit we are experiencing.

Another example: the refugee crisis. We have an existing EU council resolution that refugees should be distributed according to an allocation formula. Hungary should take 963 refugees. There is even a court ruling that Hungary should take these refugees. Orbán says no, I don't take them! We cannot sanction the European Union's own regulations. And who decides in the European Union? The EU? the EU Council and its allocation formula? Or is it Orbán? Robert Menasse's and my answer is: Neither the EU nor the so-called nation-state is the sovereign, because sovereignty always and exclusively emanates from the people.

If we want to scale the European project up to a different dimension, then we – as the people – need to be the sovereign. We need a parliament that unites. It is the necessary but not sufficient condition, that for one single democracy we need legal equality of all citizen. That is *le sacre du citoyen* – that is where our project is modelled like hundred years ago. What was the thing that the Workers' and Sailors' Councils wanted to see a hundred years ago? They wanted to see general, secret, direct and equal assembly. We are taking this demand of a hundred years ago, and we want to apply it to the European situation today. The European Parliament in its current structure offers us general, secret and direct elections, but not equal elections. Because wherever you are, Slovakia, Finland, Portugal etcetera, we are not "one person, one vote". But we are one electoral body: *le sacre du citoyen*.

With the European Balcony Project, we want to get these arguments out. I write academic articles ? no one reads them, it is a pity, but it is the truth. We are relying on theatres to get a social science wisdom into a broader public. Robert Menasse and I have experienced what theatres can do in the last weeks. They reduce complexity to simple lines, they feed it with music, they make it sexy and then make it work. So, I am very happy that the European Balcony Project relies on theatres to get our message across to publics we cannot reach. I am not an artist! I cannot sing. I can just teach you that a democracy cannot work with legal equality. That is basically what we want to achieve. I think speech acts matters. And if you could participate, we would be very happy.

To illustrate the problems with the European Council we could look at the European unemployment scheme, for example. It would have helped a lot with the crisis in Spain, Italy, Greece. The Hungarian commissioner, László Andor, brought up the idea of a European unemployment scheme already years ago. The council said no. Basically, the council, in advance, has no accountability, no transparency. Nobody knows who voted how. As a citizen, you should know what your representative voted for. This is the first point, which is about transparency. We know afterwards, because Varoufakis wrote it down in his memoir, the German government voted against the European unemployment scheme. I am not represented. Had 80 million Germans voted, a lot of the people, maybe more than 50%, would have voted in favour of the European unemployment scheme. If you want a full parliamentarization of the system, there is a deep need to abolish the council. Because the composition of the European Council results in countries being played off against each other. Every country has a business model, the German export industry, for example, makes out of Hungary and Poland a protectorate of German export industries. Citizens should not be in competition. If you want to be European citizens, we want to be European citizens, we cannot accept that we are the only sort of element in the whole European Union that does not benefit from equality. This is a message that should be kicked off and distributed. Vive la République européenne!

The one thing is clear. It is not about a super-state, equality of law, this is not centralisation. I come from the Federal State of Germany ? equality, voting, taxation, social rights. But it is not a centralized state. A super-state argument does not tap into what we want to do. We want a decentralised and social and democratic Europe for the regions. We have claims from Scotland, Catalonia, Tyrol, even Bavaria. If we are really bold about how we want to imagine the next generation, the Europe of the 21st-century, there are a lot of imaginative ideas in circulation. You can find a lot of material on our website about restructuring the European space, which can give people what they actually want. They want their identity, but most of the time, this identity is local and regional. I am from Nordrhein Westfalia, Bavaria is not my identity. What makes me equal with the Bavarians and the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, that is not the Oktoberfest or the Dirndl, it is equal law. You can imagine, in Europe, there are two components of our idea: firstly law and equality, a republic means nothing else than that. And secondly, a different arrangement of the European space beyond today's nation state. With this big, fat Germany, that plays animal farm in Europe, we will not get far with the European project. We have a lot of ideas on how to deconstruct the regional space into other spaces, so that everybody can find his or her identity, and we can make the dream of Europe come true. Unity in diversity. Unity is normative, diversity is cultural, and basically one level below the national identity.

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