

Göttweig Declaration 2012

The European Union is experiencing a difficult, perhaps its most difficult, time since the integration process started more than half a century ago. The debt crisis not only threatens individual European countries – it has turned into one of the most fundamental challenges for Europe's further development. The European Union has reached a crossroad, but the possible directions for the future are not yet discernible. What will remain of Europe? While some tend to forecast the end of the European integration process, others call for more integration and further enhancement of the European project.

For seventeen years, the European Forum Wachau has been dedicated to the process of integration. Several topics of European magnitude have been discussed, impetus for the future development of the EU has been given. The development of the integration process has always been the main focus.

Given the critical stage in European integration, the European Forum Wachau draws attention to the fact that global and regional challenges are interdependent and require joint solution strategies:

- 1.) Regions play an integral role in overcoming differences in Europe; they offer areas of security for the citizens of the European Union, who are faced with a multitude of challenges. In times of global insecurity strong regions are the very entities people can identify with, they help Europe come down to earth, so to speak. Effective interaction between regions, member states and the EU will guarantee successful future European integration policy. Ideas and initiatives emerge in the regions; they help create a critical mass in areas ranging from economy to research and development to networking and knowledge transfer. In order for the regions to successfully contribute to all the above, they need to be provided with adequate financial resources. In autumn 2010, Lower Austria had already powerfully advocated this objective, winning the support of 143 regions, and subsequently the support of some regional associations.
- 2.) Structural reform within the nation states is demanded in order to render Europe's economy more competitive on a long-term basis. In general, economic growth should be achieved by increasing competitive strength and not by way of new debt. It is therefore of paramount importance to secure the stability of the Euro. On an institutional level, better interconnectedness of EU member states is desirable to achieve the establishment of a fiscal union and subsequently a common economic and budgetary policy. In the context of the Danube Region strategy, closer

networking between the regions concerned is desirable. Lower Austria has implemented pilot projects along these lines.

- 3.) Common culture and tradition are essential for creating identity in a region. Cooperative and stable coexistence can only be achieved via comprehensive dialogue between different cultures. Macro-regional strategies such as the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the Eastern Partnership of the EU and the Regional Strategy on Intercultural Dialogue and Cooperation in South Eastern Europe within the Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) create identity and promote cultural diversity at the same time. Collecting, assessing and distributing best practice examples from the Danube and the Black Sea regions provide evidence that cultural initiatives may essentially contribute towards more respect and tolerance and less discrimination in our societies. On the European level, cultural policy is to be treated in the same way as other policy areas, and promotion vehicles are to be more easily accessible to smaller cultural projects.
- 4.) Challenges to regional and global security policies require the strengthening of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In view of decreasing financial resources, pooling and sharing seem necessary and must be harnessed by the EU. A strong European Union in the sector of foreign and security policy contributes considerably to strengthening confidence and solidarity among Union member states. In addition, measures promoting the internal security of the Union are vital to guarantee the area of freedom, security and justice to its citizens in times of global insecurity.

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