

Setting the mood for our debate

Crises are results of increased problems, contradictions, and dysfunctionalities. They offer possibilities to moderate, to tackle and to solve such problems, contradictions, and dysfunctionalities. All the different stakeholders, as they exist, are challenged to react to the accumulated problems, to contradictions, and dysfunctionalities, to deal with them. Who is able to do so realizing their own interests or the adopted interests of others, and in so doing will strengthen their own position in society in relation to the influences of others or even may change the ensuing developments.

When the global financial crisis started, problems, contradictions, and dysfunctionalities have been accumulated not only in the financial sphere, but also in the whole globalized and globalizing society with its complex economy and its imbrication with nature. A very complex global reproduction crisis has, in fact, emerged.

The European Union as a neoliberal project and its member states are among the main causers and among the stakeholders of these different structural crises.

At least, the EU with its member states could have moderated the consequences of the financial crisis, but they have not made use of the existing possibilities for doing so.

Therefore, a bank crisis has transformed into the Euro-crisis and, alongside with it, into a deep economic crisis. EU legislation would have allowed to deal with this crisis and its consequences in a much more just and sustainable way (see the „Modest Proposal“ by Galbraith, Stuart, and Varoufakis), but it has not been used for that purpose. The oligarchies and their members/partners in specific governments, in the EU and in international institutions more generally, have organized a consensus for rescuing banks and the Euro system, for a way of dealing with economic crisis on the basis of the principle that even the most competitive should become still more competitive. On this basis, the accumulated problems, contradictions, and dysfunctionalities are to be handled in a strictly neo-liberal way, i.e. mainly in the interest of the very strongest. This logic is being relentlessly pursued in all areas – with regard to free trade, to investment protection, to global competitiveness and to the ability to act globally in the interest of one's „own security“.

But only very few of the problems, contradictions and dysfunctionalities accumulated so far in the spheres of finance and the economy can be more or less reduced or even solved in this way, but not the social and societal problems ensuing from them which do include growing acts of violence, the increase in the flight of people and in migration, and certainly

not the ecological problems, and the issue of diminishing or vanishing resources.

Eight years after the open outbreak of the global financial crisis, we are facing a European Union with increased and multiplying problems and contradictions, beset by social, ecological and resource crises reinforcing, by increasing violence, and which is ever more ignoring human and citizen rights, and more or less helplessly reacting to exacerbated and still rising global problems.

More specifically:

- the EU and the Eurozone have been further developed in the direction of the neo-liberal paradigm,
- the EU law has been changed in the same direction,
- EU institutions have been changed, the financial architecture and the institutions of the Eurozone have been “improved” in a rather contradictory way,
- a new Union method is systematically being used,
- a new type of Association Agreements and free trade agreements have been signed,
- inequality and poverty have increased, the humanitarian crisis is going on, new zones of exploitation are being tapped,
- even more economic potential has been destroyed,
- solidarity and social fellow-feeling as elements of territorial cohesion are diminishing or vanishing,
- democracy has been destroyed in many respects and is still under pressure,
- a general tendency towards ideological and cultural upheavals is increasing in force,
- in the neighbourhood of the EU violence and dislocation are taking an explosive turn, thereby also affecting the EU itself,
- repression, surveillance, and militarization are growing within the EU,
- Germany has come out clearly to dominate the EU, while
- the EU is constantly declared to be in a state of emergency or exception, and leading governments are acting on this basis,
- the very existence of the European Union is beginning to be questioned.

There have been alternatives, i.e. possibilities for different paths of development. Other scenarios have been discussed in the beginning of the financial crisis.

They have not become reality because the strongest agencies have been capable of successfully acting in their very own short-term interests - thereby preventing any kind of just and democratic, socially and ecologically sustainable changes in the path of development. They have realised real breaks and turns in the actual development of the EU, while openly advocating negative scenarios: In this direction, the memorandums as agreements between debtors and creditors, above all the Eurosummit "Agreement" with Greece from July 13th have clearly mapped out real developments to come, likewise the laying down of sanctions against Russia, as well as unilateral declarations of support for Poroshenko/Jazeniuk, or the conclusion of deals against refugees, the tolerance extended to Órban&Co., and a newly declared "war against terrorism", or the unrestrained pursuit of further free trade and investment protection projects, and likewise specific political decisions reinforcing "technological development" as it is, do in fact reflect the real balance of power in the course of actual developments: i.e. the inability and unwillingness of the ruling forces politically to challenge capitalist oligarchies, or the ensuing hegemony of openly reactionary political forces and mass movements. All this sums up to a situation of strategic political defensive for the political left wing, regardless of several good results or even victories in elections. But, as a general consequence, the remaining and still increasing problems, contradictions, and conflicts of interests will not allow the ruling forces effectively to achieve more security in the situation of complexity, as it is now required. The question, therefore, will be how the other different forces, especially of the left wing, are and will become able to implement effective strategies oriented towards alternative interests and aims.

This is the question on scenarios as possible developments resulting from a contested reality. This "contested reality" means acting on one's own initiative, while fighting agencies reflecting this reality (and especially the state of the society with its economy and the prevailing balance of political forces). Such reflections and deliberations are derived from ideologies and these ideologies are in turn connected with the kind of sciences used for analysing this reality.

Therefore our attempt at "stock-taking EU development" since the open outbreak of the financial crisis demands above all an analysis from the perspective of political economy, on the one hand, which also raises a question of methodology, and, on the other hand, it requires a radical reflection of the state of the left, which includes the task of its political self-critique. Discussing such "scenarios of EU development" in earnest, therefore means

discussing possibilities of strategic action on the basis of such a “stock-taking” – and, therefore, on our possibilities to act, on strategies and the state of deployment of other forces. But above all, we shall have to fully understand our own challenges and our own possibilities to act. Accordingly, our own ability for self-analysis and self-critique, for learning about and for changing our ways of acting are to be discussed in the very first place.