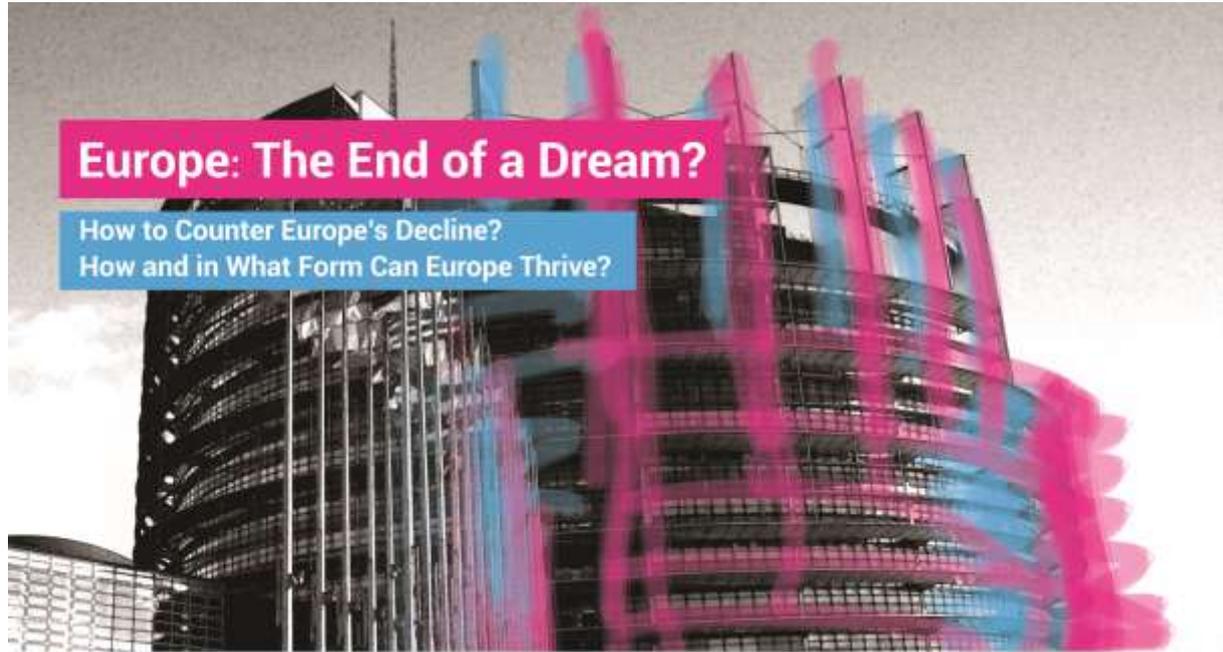


Concept Paper



“Some call it Europe – I call it home.”

Ryszard Petru
Member of the Sejm, Poland
10th Berlin Talk for Freedom

“We are Europe and Europe’s fate is our fate”,

Tomas Venclova, Poet from Lithuania

Rationale

When we formulated the first draft of this paper, the British referendum of June 23 on the “Brexit” was still months away. Now we know the results and that the majority of the British people want to exit from the European Union. The political turmoil following the referendum has thrown the future of the EU into doubt. Despite the fact that the European Union is largely seen as a success story, it is not an exaggeration to say that the EU, as we know it, is currently facing its toughest and most fundamental challenge.

The good news is that the “Brexit” served as a kind of wake-up call. Many observers herald an “existential crisis” for the European project, a crisis embracing countless appeals to affirm the EU’s basic values. Others see the appeal to individual compassion and charity (rather than to rights and legal obligations) as misguided since it will lead to the exhaustion of that compassion and charity very quickly. Instead, they claim, a long-term institutional and legal response to the refugee crisis, including the many challenging aspects of integration, is needed. Whereas some European politicians see the Brexit as a rejection of the EU as it is today warranting a speedy and continued integration towards a Federal Union state, others see the future of the EU more as a decentralized union following the subsidiary principle. A third group of politicians thinks that currently nothing drastic should be done, in order to provide stability rather than hasty change. Moreover, the debate about a two- or a multi-speed Europe has returned with a vengeance, defining opposite visions for a future EU. And last but not least, even a Post-Brexit EU enlargement, especially in the Balkans, might be back on the agenda. Some are of the opinion that there cannot be a better signal of Europe’s commitment to the European project than through expanding to the Balkans.

Especially in Eastern Europe, but not exclusive to it, the rise of nationalism, chauvinism and xenophobia is alarming to many. Populist political movements and parties have exploited the situation for their more and more shrill and extreme messages contravening the very basic ideals of open societies. The European model of an open society with open borders and freedom of movement is under threat.

The outcome of the British referendum has also polarized the liberal family. Among libertarians about 80 per cent saw the Brexit as a positive thing, defying the big state and liberating the people from the bureaucratic yoke of the EU. The political dimension of the EU, however, was largely ignored, if mentioned at all. In a famous speech, the late Guido Westerwelle, former German Foreign Minister and leader of the German liberal party, passionately stressed the political dimensions of the European project, which for the first time in history brought peace and prosperity to the continent.

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) has done a lot over the last couple of years to debate and identify liberal perspectives as far as the future of Europe is concerned¹. The current multiple crises with which Europe is confronted, however, do warrant a fresh look at the various issues, norms and values that are important for liberals and libertarians. The first and foremost of the challenges is the refugee crisis, which has shaken the EU to its bones, one could say. Another one is certainly the unresolved financial crisis related to the common currency the EURO and the EURO zone, especially as far as the Greece debt crisis is concerned. The third one is the UK-referendum and the post-Brexit negotiations which are currently in limbo. And there is more: securing the outside borders, the common security and defence challenge, energy security, and the fight against terrorism to name only a few.

Regarding the European`s attitude towards the European Union and Europe, surveys from 2015 show that trust in the European Union has strengthened (40%) compared to previous years and the trust in national political institutions has also improved slightly, though it is still at a lower level than trust in the European Union (Annex 1). 41% of the European citizens have a positive image of the EU (Annex 2), 42 % of the European citizens believe their vote

¹ ELF: “Liberal perspectives on European Integration”, October 2014; “Re-imagining Europe: The Liberal Way” (2015) and “The Solutions We Need – Policy recommendations of the Ralf Dahrendorf Taskforce on the Future of Europe”

counts in the EU. Survey on the optimism about the future of the EU recognizes that 58% of Europeans feel optimistic about it. More than two-thirds of Europeans feel that they are citizens of the EU².

Almost three quarters of Europeans think that what brings them together is more important than what separates them. That shows a Special Euro barometer of the European Parliament conducted in the 28 Member States, from 9 to 18 April 2016. Regarding perceptions and expectations of the sufficiency of European Policies, 69% consider EU action to be insufficient and 77% would like to see the EU take more action as regards fight against unemployment, 66 % consider EU action against tax fraud insufficient, 66 % see the EU action on the issue of migration insufficient, 71% would like to see the EU take more action on the protection of external borders. The same relates to promotion of democracy and peace and fight against terrorism. These data clearly indicates that there are high expectations of a much more proactive EU on the issues of the common EU policies and the role of the EU as an international actor (Annex 3)³.

The Objectives of the Consultation

It is in this light that the Regional Office for East and Southeast Europe of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (ESEE) has decided to hold our annual consultation on the “Future of Freedom” in Bucharest. This year’s theme is **“Europe: The end of a dream? How to counter Europe’s decline? How and in what form can Europe thrive?”**

The consultation brings together representatives from the various FNF partner organizations from civil society, think tanks and political parties from the region and beyond. The aims of the event are:

- to analyse and debate the causes and effects of current trends in Europe;
- to identify various liberal options as far as the future of the EU in particular and Europe in general are concerned; and
- to exchange experiences, share highlights and best practices, identify synergies and formulate common action and possible campaigns for a liberal Europe.

Venue and Proposed Program

Bucharest, Romania was chosen as the venue for the second “Future of Freedom” consultation. The road to Bucharest is “a road well-travelled”⁴. The choice of the venue underlines the importance the Foundation attributes to Europe in general and one of three latest accession states in particular. Romania is the largest of those three states and the

² Standard Euro barometer 83, Spring 2015 “Public opinion in the European Union”

³ Special Euro barometer of the European Parliament “Europeans in 2016: Perceptions, expectations, fight against terrorism and radicalization”

⁴ The “well travelled road effect” is a cognitive bias in which travelers will estimate the time taken to traverse routes differently depending on their familiarity with the route. Frequently travelled routes are assessed as taking a shorter time than unfamiliar routes. This effect creates errors when estimating the most efficient route to an unfamiliar destination, when one candidate route includes a familiar route, whilst the other candidate route includes no familiar routes. The effect has been observed for centuries but was first studied scientifically in the 1980s and 1990s following from earlier “heuristics and biases” work undertaken by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Well_travelled_road_effect

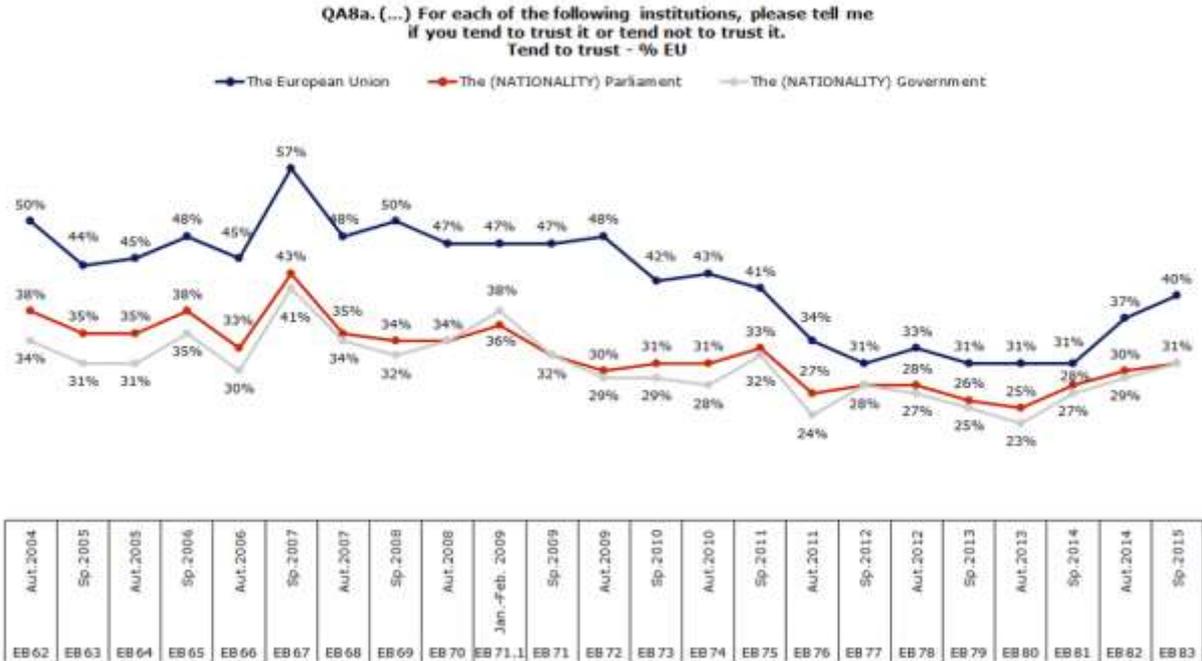
ninth biggest economy in the EU. Our choice acknowledges the great progress Romania has made in its economic, political and social development over the last decade.

Incidentally, the FNF is currently commemorating its 25th anniversary in Romania. Therefore the first evening of the event will be reserved for presentations and discussions related to a quarter of a century’s work for freedom. The second day will start with a few keynote speeches about the future of Europe followed by an open space where all participants can bring in those aspects of freedom they are passionate about as far as the future of Europe is concerned. They will present their ideas and organize working groups around the proposed issues. The results of the open space will be presented to the plenary. On the morning of the last day we will identify common issues for strengthened collaboration so that we can intensify our joint efforts to promote our values, norms and policy ideas.

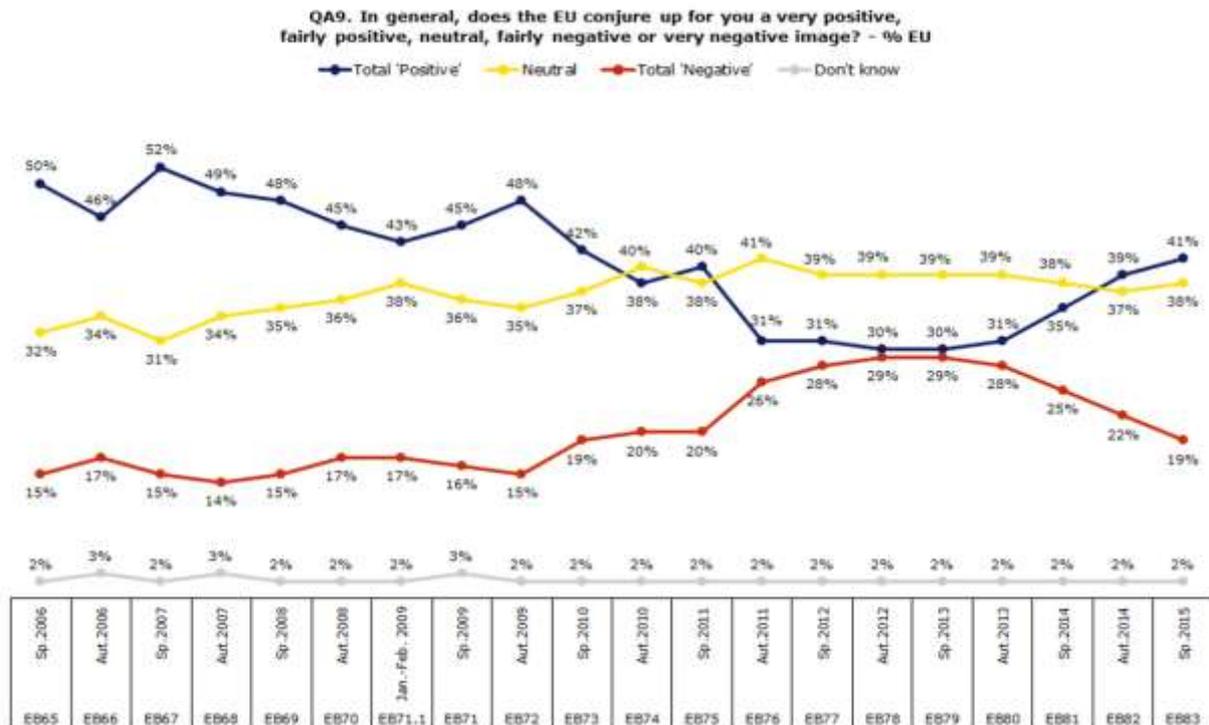
Who Should Attend?

First and foremost, representatives from FNF partner organization in politics, economics and social spheres, researchers, scholars, liberal activists, politicians, entrepreneurs from East and Southeast Europe in particular and Western Europe in general. The event is organized along the principles of the “un-conferencing” approach. Last year, we gained valuable experience with this format during The Future of Freedom event in Istanbul, Turkey. Participation is not an empty phrase to us. Therefore, we expect all participants to contribute to the debates and discussions but also to actively present their own experiences and results from their work. The proposed format, an open space, a technology to stimulate involvement and ownership, allows for a maximum of participant-generated content and participant-gear processes.

Annex 1: Trust in the European Union, National Parliaments and National Governments



Annex 2: Image of the European Union



Annex 3: Perceptions and expectations of the European Union's actions

For each of the following, would you say that current EU action is excessive, adequate/ about right or insufficient? (%)

