

1. *What is your opinion, according to your political / economic / social position, about the European Project, where do nations achieve somehow "unity in diversity"?*

The outstanding diversity within Europe can be understood as a huge strength for the Europeans. Due to our diversity in terms of, for example, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, religions, history, relations with countries outside Europe and different approaches we can learn a lot from each other and achieve a lot for the future of Europe and the Europeans. We achieve "unity in diversity" when we are able to use this strength, when we create mutual understanding and win-win-scenarios. The foundation for this unity is formed by common values. Democracy, rule of law, freedom and peace are among the core values. Actually, these values are promises to the Europeans and to the whole world. We have to keep these promises. The effectiveness of these values is the revenue of our "unity in diversity".

The European integration is one of the most successful developments in history. The people of my generation and younger ones inherited it from generations before us. We grew up in a peaceful world, our generation does not know any war, but wealth due to the common market. Now it is the obligation of the next generation to put Europe in the position of a big player on the global scale. There are still too many issues in global politics where Europe is a passive bystander rather than an active shaper. Real unity inside also means that we cannot be divided from the outside but act as a reliable partner to other parts of the world. This must be our goal.

2. *We consider that the action of the European Union as a multi-state organization, in an intergovernmental way (regional) and in a transnational (supranational-global) direction. What can you explain us, about such interactions? Do you agree on the multilevel performances of the European Union?*

Neither in history nor in our times there has been an institution similar to the European Union. We are a Union of sovereign nations understanding the meaning of subsidiarity. This means some obligations and issues need to be handled on the European level.

Due to the above-mentioned values and previous generations, who have worked hard for peace and prosperity, we are able to experience today's Europe as a place of freedom and prosperity. The processes to figure out which issues should fall under the responsibility of political bodies and which level of policymaking should take care of them are always ongoing. That is part of vibrant democratic structures.

That is why I agree with some intergovernmental action if it is really needed, for example, between member states. I strongly defend the idea of local and regional competences for a large number of questions, which can be best handled right on-site. And I fight for a much larger engagement of the EU-institutions in foreign policy questions, as well as in security and development questions. The EU has to become much stronger to the outside world.

I recognize that the threats we face today – from rising extremism and terrorism to radical regimes and nuclear proliferation – require more engagement and closer cooperation among all likeminded powers in this world. This also means to deepen values-based political, security and economic cooperation.

3. *In your opinion, what creates divisions and / or incoherence on the performances of policies within the European Union, its Institutions and its Member States?*

First of all, the unanimity rule in the European Council has to be mentioned here. Too often when Europe needs a quick decision, we act slow or ambiguous. We must act and react faster. The

Europeans and the whole world deserve clarity regarding the positions and actions of the European Union.

One precondition to overcome this issue will be a new understanding of European identity and Europe's important role in the world, of the impact of our strength or weakness to the outside for opportunities, prosperity and jobs inside Europe.

Terrible developments like populism, disrespect for the rule of law and other European core values appear in some parts of Europe. This has also the potential to divide us, outdated structures like the unanimity rule in many questions is an open door for persons and parties intending division.

One other thing that must not be underestimated are potential fault lines between east Europe and west Europe. My home country Austria can in some respect be counted as the most eastern country of western Europe. My impression is, that in western Europe we have a huge responsibility to think harder about the narratives of the European integration. Two examples: The EU does not only have western European founding fathers, but also eastern European ones. The European Coal and Steel Community was not the very beginning of everything. The whole story actually was a process that cannot be told or understood without the transformation in the former Warsaw Pact countries as an essential part. Rethinking our narratives will have a large impact on our policies.

4. In our research, we consider two main threats to the functioning of the European Union. Those threats are, in one hand, the lack of convergences between the European Regions (lagging regions: political, social and economic) and a second hand, the shaping of a multilevel governance facing an intergovernmentalism in the European Union as ethnic clashes, financial crisis, migratory flows, security concerns, and so on, political polarization, including the farewell of a member state in 2019. What can you say about such big threats?

First of all: It remains to be seen whether this farewell will take place at all.

And for the rest: In terms of the interaction between rural areas and urban centres the EU is a real success story. Nowhere in the world the regions face a lower rate of migration into cities. One of the reasons for that is the EU-subsidiarity-principle. Of course, we have to work hard to keep up the necessary political programs, for example in the next MFF period.

Centralist tendencies must be decisively counteracted. EU programs, which gently and with great consistency facilitate the balance between city and countryside, must be defended against all sorts of desires, and there are many. That is the reason why I fought with passion for the regional funds as the Chairperson of the Europe Committee in the Lower Austrian Parliament, and why I have been doing it for almost two years now as a Member of the European Parliament. Personally, I do not want to miss the pulsation of the big cities, nor do I want to miss neighbourly relations with each other in the countryside or the reliability and mutual support in rural areas. We must realize that there can also be a caring neighbour in cities, and that there is innovation and creativity in the countryside as well; and that one and the same person can be at home in both of these worlds.

To summarize the above-mentioned positions and examples we need more freedom to the inside and more strength to the outside. Europeans should experience a much less bureaucratic European Union. And all of us could find more and more to be proud of since Europe shows a good example to the world – among others in terms of values, respect of human dignity and individual freedom, of democracy and rule of law, which leads to a level of peace and prosperity the world has never seen before, nowhere. These elements, that we can be proud of, are also the ones we must defend at all times.

There's a lot to do: We have to remain ambitious, and we have to offer perspectives. For example, we need to strengthen not only the large players, but also the backbone of our economies, the small and medium-sized enterprises. They are innovative, entrepreneurial, flexible and agile. They can provide vocational training to our youth.

5. What do you think about possible enlargement processes in the European Union? Versus Brexit?

Things should not be mixed up. The United Kingdom is in great trouble because of the whole Brexit-nightmare. I want the UK to remain or at least to return. More than everything this would be in the interest of the people of this wonderful country. And I guess, there is a large probability for the one or the other.

The Western Balkans are the closest region to the European Union. If the six Western Balkan states help each other rather than hinder one another, there can be a peaceful and prosperous future for all of them within the European Union. I do not intend to impose from the outside my views on obligations for the policymakers in these countries. But I want to provide the people there with the example of societies which have overcome divisions due to ethnicities or religions. To overcome such divisions – and of course to fully establish democracy and rule of law – means to open the gates for investments, growth, jobs and opportunities.

It must be clarified, that an EU membership of Turkey is not an option.

6. Do you consider that the multiple existence of challenges which the European Union is facing today (2019) prove a certain failure of the European Governance?

In 2019, the European Union is facing multiple challenges from the outside through migration, terrorism and climate change but also from the inside through the rise of populist movements and disrespect for the rule of law in some parts of Europe. In my opinion, these challenges are not a product of failed governance. However, the current set-up of the EU exacerbates the challenges as the European Union is not able to adequately react to them. The EU must become stronger to the outside. We must work together to face challenges like migration or climate change that no single government can manage on its own. That is what European citizens expect from us. At the same time, we must ensure that the principle of subsidiarity is respected at all times and that decisions are taken as close as possible to the people. This will help to regain citizens' trust in the European Union.

7. What would you suggest in a European Union as a multinational project? Do you consider yourself as a pro-European? Or as a Eurosceptic? Why?

I hope the response to the first question can be found in the responses above.

I consider myself a Pro-European.

The European Union is the best that ever happened to our continent. In fact, it did not just happen from one day to the other. It was established via hard work from multiple generations. They gave peace and prosperity a chance. We inherited today's Europe and have the obligation to develop it.

8. What are the working objectives of the working group "Paneuropa" from the European People's Party?

We have introduced a new format for Plenary Weeks in Strasbourg. It is called "Happy Hour of Free Speech", in which everyone can speak freely. We want to stimulate a lively and informal discussion between as many people as possible in order to reach a broad discourse. Of course, the whole regular idea of a parliament is to put people in the position to speak freely. In the case of our Working Group we especially invite the ones who usually do not speak since they are not for example

elected officials, commission or government officials. Everybody that is present in Strasbourg deserves an opportunity like this. Let us see how many will grab the Microphone to share information, arguments and opinions.

9. In fact, the European Union is facing multiple challenges that affect several dimensions: political, economic, social and technological. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges for the future of a sustainable and united European Union, according to the Pan-Europa Group?

There are so many policy papers. Most of them are either redundant or never find their ways to decision makers or the public. That is one of the reasons why the Paneuropean Working Group has decided to provide space for discussion and reflection, to bring people together and to make win-win-scenarios more probable, not to produce extra policy papers. Regarding my policy, the responses above and below provide the big picture and some details of my priorities.

10. In your experience as MEP from Austria, what are the most important values that give identity and legitimacy to the European Union?

Respect of human dignity, securing individual freedom, democratic structures, rule of law, peace, prosperity, being valuable for the Europeans and the people all over the world.

11. How important is the empowerment of citizens, in line with their convictions, to promote their interests within the European Union?

Empowerment of citizens is what democracy is all about. It is the thing that keeps a modern democratic state running. So, the importance of empowerment cannot be underestimated for the future development of the European Union and of course for representing the interests of the people. To speak on behalf of the represented people is the wonderful obligation of an elected official. So, a Parliamentarian always must listen before she or he speaks.

12. In general, which are the main challenges which the EU is facing today? Which issues are the most important ones?

In my view the main challenges concern a stronger foreign policy, more cooperation in security, less regulation, more education especially in the field of vocational training and more research especially in the field of artificial intelligence, as well as the reform of the institutions and more European investments in culture and arts.

13. Do you consider any kind of regional, social, technological and economic division lines which are bringing in doubt the future of the EU? Between Member States, between Regions? Globally?

The above-mentioned factors, which create division, all implicate specific risks for the future of the EU.

14. Do you have a proposal about how the European Union could go forward promoting the main values such as human rights, rule of law and democracy?

I want to improve the freedom internally and the strength to the outside, that is my vision for the future of the European Union.