

# The Future of Europe as a Peace Project

## Introduction

PAX developed four scenarios for the future of Europe based on three two-day meetings in Utrecht, Belgrade and Kyiv (in November and December 2018). These scenarios show that while many take peace in the European Union for granted, it could in fact turn out to be fragile. For the full report on the scenarios and a short film clip, see [www.paxforpeace.nl/EU2040](http://www.paxforpeace.nl/EU2040). How does PAX itself view the four scenarios?



**Paranoid Android scenario:** If we go too far in organizing security (by which is meant security for ourselves in the EU), that could be at the expense of civil rights and put pressure on our democratic social contract. We would then also be forsaking the EU's role in the world of strengthening democracy and the rule of law.

**United States of Europe scenario:** In this scenario, there is further political integration and European values are safeguarded. But two important questions remain. Will there be sufficient public support for far-reaching integration if we are unable to resolve the problems of those citizens who experience the disadvantages rather than the advantages of globalization? And strangely enough, while the EU does set up its own army in this scenario, it only uses soft power in its external relations.

**East, West, North Best scenario:** In this scenario, various regional networks come into being while the EU as we know it falls apart. The question is whether our European values would still survive. Economic and political short-term objectives are likely to dominate in such a complex context where regional entities enter into alliances as the occasion demands. This could constitute a considerable risk for the necessary long-term anchoring of democracy and solidarity—especially if external threats increase rather than decrease.



**All Against All scenario:** In this scenario, we return to a Europe in which individual countries mistrust one another, do not cooperate and as a consequence are more likely to succumb to the temptation of conflict escalation with its alleged benefits. This would be a return to the Europe of past centuries that went from one war to the next. That is not a good prospect!

### **European values and integration**

For PAX as a peace organisation, the EU is a successful peace project, however much we may criticise certain policy directions and its internal organisation. The essence of the EU as a peace project lies in our European values. The best way to anchor those values is through integration and structural cooperation between the EU member states in European institutions. It therefore follows that we feel most comfortable with the principles underlying the scenario that combines the preservation of European values with far-reaching integration: *the United States of Europe*. Even so, PAX has some serious doubts about how this specific scenario would work out in practice, as noted above.

### **More political unity desired**

In the decades of economic prosperity, the emphasis was on economic integration. However, it has become increasingly clear that a more coordinated response is also needed to political challenges. That was already an important issue during the Balkan wars in the 1990s, but other examples include the economic crisis of the past decade, the emergency plans for Greece, the question of how to deal with new groups of refugees and migrants, the relationship with Russia and the wars in Syria and Iraq. It seems as if the EU is constantly being caught by surprise, or at any rate is unable to come up with a unanimous policy in short order—with the possible exception of Brexit!

In our call for more political unity, we are not just talking about reversing adverse developments but also about encouraging positive developments. To take some topical issues, how can we, as the EU, best support the democratic ambitions of citizens in Algeria and Sudan? Which raises the following question too as regards Sudan: how should we judge the EU's deal with President Bashir (now deposed) in the light of the mass calls to respect the human dignity of the people of Sudan? Can the EU be a credible advocate of more democracy after helping the Bashir regime to survive with that deal? Is it not the case that our need for state security ('holding back and preventing flows of refugees') clashes with the need for human security of the citizens who have suffered under Bashir's dictatorship for the past thirty years?

### **Critical voices within the European Union**

At the same time, we are seeing bickering and serious stagnation within the European Union. It is embroiled in difficult discussions with countries such as Hungary and Poland, where politicians are interfering with the legal system, the media and citizens' initiatives in a way that is diametrically opposed to our European values. But the crisis is more widespread. Populist parties that want 'less Europe' are doing well in almost all of Europe. With their analyses of threats to the national identity, they are not only bolstering calls for 'Fortress



Europe' but also putting social cohesion in their own countries sharply to the test. Most of these parties also performed well in the recent European elections. However, it would be foolish and short-sighted to respond merely by wagging a finger at them. We need to apprehend why certain countries see issues from a different perspective to us here in the Netherlands. We should start a new dialogue on what those European values could and should involve in practice, in particular regarding the major challenges of our time. Our European values are set down in a treaty (the Treaty of Lisbon, 2007), but that does not mean they are carved in stone. Our European values have evolved over time and will continue to do so.

The populists are doing well because millions of citizens are struggling with problems, mainly socio-economic in nature, that they feel politicians are ignoring. They are looking for certainty and security in a rapidly changing world and they hope the populist parties will offer a solution. The fact that those parties' answers will not work does not make the citizens' questions irrelevant. The EU will face an unpredictable future if its institutions and member states are unable to help them resolve their problems.

### **Putting citizens centre stage!**

To tackle these challenges, PAX is advocating value-driven European policies that put citizens centre stage. Such a course should be reflected in both the EU's internal policies and its external relations.

### **Policy within the European Union**

As regards policy within the EU (its 'home affairs'), an effort needs to be made to restore the EU's relationship with citizens in the EU member states. This involves a two-pronged approach. First, policy needs to be developed that satisfies the valid demands concerning security and socio-economic prospects, the issues that EU citizens care about at present. At the same time, a dialogue is needed about the important European values that shore up our democracies and constitutional states and enable an open society. Research shows that there is a great deal of support for the open society values in countries such as Hungary and Poland too, but that they find other things more important in certain circumstances. That translates into support for measures that could clash with the agreements we have made with one another in the EU.

Better policies that take citizens' concerns seriously should therefore go hand in hand with a dialogue about the importance of our European values. It goes without saying that talking about European values will not produce results if the needs of large groups of citizens are ignored.

### **External policies**

As regards the EU's external policies, 'putting citizens centre stage' means prioritising human dignity and human security. In the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, there was a great deal of support for such a focus on human dignity and human security. However, in recent years state security (meaning *our* state security) has come to



dominate policy again. We see this in the migrant deals with Sudan, anti-terrorism policies of the kind that the Syrian president Assad, for example, profits from, stabilisation policies that benefit those in power and men with weapons, whereby only the defeated are tried for war crimes (Iraq), and attempts to close the EU's borders to asylum seekers wherever possible, resulting in inhuman conditions at the border, on land and at sea.

The EU is a power player in international politics and precisely because of that, it should do more to pursue an external policy that reflects its own values, one that does not merely serve our short-term interests but also actively supports processes promoting democracy, inclusive justice and development.

That means for example that in its relations with the Western Balkans—countries that want to join the European Union—it should look more at how to strengthen citizens' initiatives that focus on those European values and can bolster the call for change within the country. The underlying causes of the recent wars need to be tackled. That requires a political effort and more resources. The conflicts that led to the wars in the 1990s will not disappear of their own accord through membership of the European Union, as the dynamics of EU member state Croatia's relations with its neighbours demonstrate.

### **A task for many**

Nearly 75 years after the end of the Second World War, the EU is facing major challenges. Making the right choices and creating backing for them will be difficult unless the EU puts citizens centre stage. Europe's institutions need to get to work, as do the governments of the EU member states. But civil society associations and European networks also have an important part to play. PAX plans to focus on this in the next few years, by discussing matters with policy-makers and by collaborating with citizens to see how we can breathe new life into those European values using a bottom-up approach.

Do you have any proposals of your own for how we can strengthen the EU as a peace project? We are keen to hear all your suggestions and ideas!

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