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THE NEW GREAT GAME



**DEBATING
MIGRATION**



**RUSSIAN
QUANDARIES**



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RENEW EUROPE AND ENLARGE EUROPE

MIGRATION PROBLEMS AND WESTERN BALKAN SOLUTIONS

Zsolt Németh

EUROPE and the European Union have been in crisis for rather a long time. Even without having to analyze the nature and origin of the crisis, we can all see and feel its symptoms daily.

Migration is a phenomenon that signals a clash of ideologies within Europe, and such a clash makes it obvious how Europe deals with its problems. For instance, Yves Cochet, a former French minister for the environment and regional planning, called on French mothers to bear fewer babies, calling on the government to sanction French families with more than one child.

This is music to the ears of migrants who are ready to take the place of the children that are sorely lacking in Europe—which I suspect is the explicit aim of Cochet's move.

The phenomenon represented by this French politician is suicidal to Europe's culture and lacks the sober mind of self-protection. For most Central Europeans, what he said is mind-boggling, and I am convinced that many people in the increasingly depopulated Balkan Peninsula might also see it the same way.

In Hungary, the government supports families with more than one child in many ways, including providing a considerable amount of money. We are aware that such an issue cannot be resolved solely by financial means, as many reasons might be more psychological and moral in nature.

This is also the case in Hungary—as it is in the EU generally—but we are tackling that side of the issue as well. The reason I and my government continue to emphasize this issue is that we think our

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Photo: Guliver Image/Getty Images

Just one of many untold migrant stories

beloved Europe is fading before of our very eyes—much like the fictional island of Atlantis, which sank into the sea.

TALLYING UP RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS

If one wanted to tally up the results achieved by the European Union over the past five years, one could say that we managed to let masses of non-Europeans in, whilst being unable to stop millions of Britons from leaving. In other words, the EU is getting rid of Europeans while inviting non-Europeans into its embrace.

If we let the British leave, we will be losing massive amounts of money that

the UK has been contributing to the EU and European institutions, let alone the loss of their military contribution. The United Kingdom is the EU's second largest economy. And for our political branch, the loss of the Conservative Party in the European Parliament is also a sensitive issue. In my view, disappearing conservatism is a loss for the whole of the European Parliament, even those opposing it.

We entered 2019 with the threat of a shrinking EU, which gives us nothing to celebrate, and, at the same time, a growing foreign population that does not identify with our cultural heritage. This is not a promising

start, for I am an advocate of a larger Europe, not a shrinking one. We need a Europe that enlarges to encompass European states and European people in Southeast Europe.

The EU must be renewed and reformed in order to fit its original purposes. The EU started out as a voluntary alliance of free nations in order to secure peace and prosperity in Europe. Yet we see, on a daily basis, the waning of the voluntary factor and an increasing role of dictates from the Brussels-based institutions that came to life as a separate and alienated body within the EU—serving their own purposes, not those of their members.

Such behavior of the EU was criticized harshly by the British until the UK's dissatisfaction finally culminated in the snappy response that was Brexit. The British did not find the EU to be attractive enough, so they cast their votes in favor of departure. The conclusions of Brexit must be drawn in the EU institutions too, not only in the UK.

The essence of the reform would thus be to render the EU an institution that strengthens its member states by uniting their efforts. The EU must serve its members, not the other way around. Stronger member states produce a stronger EU: this is our basic, common

sense position. And there are member states that strongly urge the EU to continue with its enlargement.

THE SOUTHEAST CRISIS

Another symptom of a weakening EU is our decreasing influence in Southeast Europe. I remember the EU that had “world-conquering” dreams 20 years ago. The EU wanted to play itself up economically to the league of global actors, and this seemed a realistic vision at that time.

Then, the 2008 economic crisis blew our dreams away and we remained a local factor. The most attractive feature of the EU is its 70 years of peace, which is not to be underestimated—needless to emphasize in the Balkans.

On the one hand, a weakening EU is losing its appeal in the eyes of those who live in Southeast Europe and who wanted (and to some extent still want) to be part of the EU. On the other, a weakening Southeast Europe provides another headache to the EU, another problem to deal with in the vast array of others. However, if the EU continues to approach the Balkans in such a way, the distance between the two sides will only grow.

Take Albania as an example. The country's image in the eyes of the West is worrisome. The further

Albania drifts away from democratic and legal solutions, the more it will need the EU. The more the EU turns a cold shoulder to a rightfully criticized and probably unfairly feared Albania, the more Albania will feel abandoned, left alone and lagging behind with its serious economic problems. Watching the back of a departing EU negotiator takes away that last hope from Albania, making it desperate. The other way out for a desperate Albania from its isolated situation can only generate another problem for the whole of Southeast Europe.

From an EU perspective alone, which problem would be easier to handle: the present situation of a failing Albania, or a possible future comprehensive issue of a Southeast Europe that contains a failed state?

The pace of the integration process in the respective cases of Serbia and Montenegro is painstakingly slow, while Bosnia has never gained candidate status. If we compare the EU's integration policies with those of NATO, the difference is striking. NATO has maintained an attractive position due

to its tangible accomplishments in the region. The Alliance stayed within reach of the Western Balkan states,

which is not true for the EU today. The negative downward spiral must be stopped and turned into a positive one.

These examples show that the EU is hesitant and reluctant with its enlargement policy, which makes it easy to be under the impression that the EU does not have a clear vision of Southeast Europe. This is one of the symptoms of the

European crisis. In part, the EU's internal problems leave it so self-centered that little energy remains to focus on its neighborhood, enlargement, and external policies.

While we do have an ambitious foreign policy and strategy, it is one that EU High Commissioner Federica Mogherini is unable to realize. And the Balkan states feel that they fall victim to this contradictory situation within the EU: the EU's central institutions might have a strategy for Southeast Europe, but they do not have enough energy to make it work, for it keeps failing with the German, French, and Benelux authorities.

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The EU is not the only one with internal tensions. The countries of the Western Balkans have serious growing tensions of their own. Hungary is a neighbor of Southeast Europe, which ensures we're well aware of these tensions. These places are burdened by economic, demographic, and ethnic tensions. Balkan economic problems create mass emigration to the EU; the resulting rapidly depopulating countries generate unsolvable economic problems—there will be nobody left to work or take care of the retired.

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An empty state is a state without a future. This complex problem is really urgent. Otherwise, someone else will find a future for such states, but that future will be far from identical with the Serbian, Bosnian, or any other Balkan dream. Operating a complex state like Bosnia-Herzegovina is so challenging that it might end up hurting the interests of one of its ethnic component at some point. Yet, Bosnia serves as a mirror of Southeast Europe, reflecting all of the region's problems. Almost all of the main local and global powers are present in the Balkans, in which they exert their influence.

The increasing Muslim presence is not a pacifying element in the formula either. These problems have been further deepened by migration. A phenomenon like migration puts extra burdens on Southeast European countries and destabilizes the already fragile peninsula. It is thus not difficult to see that an unstable Southeast Europe is in no way in the interest of the EU.

In 2018, we saw a 92 percent reduction in the number of illegal migrants arriving in Europe compared to 2015, when the crisis reached

its peak. The fact that they eventually chose another path—the riskier Mediterranean Sea route—demonstrates that if we, Central and Southeast European states, cooperate and close down a corridor, migrants stop heading in our direction.

If we were to shut down all the corridors, migrants would realize the necessity of finding an alternative solution to their domestic problems—probably a more genuine one that would tackle the problem at its root. Recognition that we must help tackle the origin of the problem has happened in European institutions with regard to African states, though this

has not yet occurred in the case of the Balkan states.

ENLARGEMENT IS THE SOLUTION

Each Southeast European state has its specific problems. Still, there is one common cause of tension, and it seems to be being generated by the EU: slow enlargement. However, enlargement is the solution, not only for the region, but also for the EU. The EU must spread to the Balkans and integrate what has always been a part of Europe.

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Even the perspective of potential and achievable accession helps stabilize Southeast Europe and gives hope to its nations. Accession must include an element of reality with an achievable date, otherwise it is demoralizing and disappointing.

Central European states are supportive of enlarging the EU to the southeast corner of the Old Continent for several reasons. In the case of Hungary, we are neighbors, so we know the region better, which means we want to integrate for essential economic reasons, besides emotional ones; though the emotional reason, which involves cultural links, is not a weak

one. Having once been excluded from Europe by the Iron Curtain, we experienced the importance of belonging to Europe through this bitter separation.

Our strong and deep desire to reunify with Europe came to fruition in 2004. Our understanding of the 2004 EU integration was a “reunification act of Europe.” We linked together what already belonged together. It was a similar act for us as the reunification of the two German states was for the German people. If someone understands the importance of

being European by being excluded, then they will most likely do their best to end the separation. We wish to keep “the European value”—especially solidarity—within the framework of the EU, and we wish to share this value with the Southeast European nations.

We Hungarians also have an ethnic reason, which has already served as a pacifying and trade-facilitating factor in our case, and which is unique in the Balkans. The rights Serbia provides to our ethnic Hungarian community have proven to be beneficial for both sides, having led to positive relations between our two countries and helped create an

environment that was rewarding for Serbia. Thus, the change in the attitude proved that the “Hungarian presence” in Serbia had only positive effects for both sides. Perhaps it all started with an historic reconciliation intended to soothe the deep wounds that we inflicted and sustained during World War II.

We have also provided Serbia with tangible help in closing its chapters within the EU accession process. Since we have already been through the process and know the procedure, the accumulated experience on our side can be passed on to present candidates. We actually operate an expert network throughout Southeast Europe to accelerate the region’s inclusion in Transatlantic and European organizations. Hungary has also provided, and will continue to provide, the Contact Point for NATO at Hungarian embassies.

The dream of belonging to the Schengen zone together with our neighbors was partly inspired by this ethnic link as well. No matter how far this dream seems to be now, we keep thinking strategically about this aspect. We also provide a seat in the European Parliament to an ethnic Hungarian from Serbia, Andor Deli—which, in a way, means that Serbia is represented in the European Parlia-

ment even before the completion of the accession process. We are going to retain that seat in the next EU election in May.

We see Southeast European nations as Europeans, temporarily situated outside

the EU’s borders. We consider this to be neither a normal situation nor the final one.

As neighbors who know the Balkans profoundly well, we also see the underlying problems that might cause conflicts sooner or later. Worries of our neighbors, therefore, also drive us towards urging EU enlargement. We try to convince Brussels that the heart of Europe is secure only as long as Southeast Europe is stable. It is in everybody’s interest to enhance the stability and prosperity of the Balkans. Only shared economic, political, and ethnic stability can result in security.

Enlargement does not contradict the EU’s internal reforms. On the contrary, enlargement is part of such reforms. EU leaders must recognize this and change their perspective to see the solution. Everybody agrees with the statement that a strong Europe needs a stable and prosperous Balkans. However, conflicting standpoints on enlargement remain. Stability and

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enlargement are tightly connected, but this process works in two ways: a positive and a negative. The dilemma is whether enlargement helps or imports stability. We urge to continue enlargement toward the Southeast European states, first of all Serbia, because that is crucial for the security of Europe. Serbia can and must play a stabilizing role in the region. I believe this is Serbia’s call today.

The idea of French President Emmanuel Macron that the reform of EU structures must happen

before enlargement does not appeal to Hungary. This approach simply reveals French and German fears of the strengthening new voice, which proposes an alternative vision of the EU—as expressed by the Visegrad Group, which stresses the value of sovereignty. Since enlargement is our common goal, Serbia and Hungary should work on a positive Balkan image together, which means presenting reasons why enlargement is important for Europe and why it serves stability.

The formation that is able to counterweight Macron’s standpoint is the Visegrad Four (V4). We are ready and

able to provide support to EU enlargement, and the V4 is taking the lead in this regard.

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Since our direct goal is to urge the EU to give Serbia and Montenegro concrete dates of EU accession—and to close accession chapters as quick as possible, as well as to urge the EU to give a start date for Albania and North Macedonia’s negotiation processes—we need to be realistic and operative. For the lack of a better way, we feel the fastest and most effective way forward is

to wait until May 2019, when we will have elected a fresh European Parliament, and with it a new Commission. The present European Commission and Parliament seem reluctant and suspicious towards Southeast and Central Europe’s intention to continue with EU enlargement.

However, the next European Commission and Parliament must act quickly, preventing the EU from missing an historic opportunity. If the next Brussels apparatus decides to act in the same reluctant manner as the present one, then this historic chance might be gone forever. ●