Is Solidarity in Europe Fading?

by Christian Moos, Secretary General of Europa-Union Deutschland

The question whether Europe’s solidarity is fading is rather rhetorical. It might be expected of me as a European federalist that I object this view.

I could claim that the Eurozone reached a new agreement on Greece and I could even argue that it is a working arrangement.

I could maintain that Germany’s role in Europe is entirely unproblematic, that there are no divisions between the EU member states et cetera.

I would not be entirely wrong if I put forward that Europe has always grown in times of crises.

But I do not intend to do this for it cannot be expected of me that I close my eyes to reality and I do not believe that denial would help our cause.

Having said that, it is my firm belief that should their union fail the Europeans do not stand a chance of surviving the next decades in freedom.

The states that form the European Union as integral part of the Western world need solidarity because there is no single Western European power that could preserve the European order, safeguard peace and stability.

Globalization is not the only hazard. There are other factors. At the dawn of the 21st century there is only one great power left in Europe or, to speak with John Darwin, only one empire in Western Eurasia. And that is Russia.

Europe is on a slippery slope. It doesn’t stand united facing its challenges. It has too many frictions and fractures. Unless our democratic leaders overcome these we are heading towards very tough times.

How can we achieve solidarity in Europe? Solidarity can only be enhanced through institutionalized policies and mechanisms that prevent the resurgence of national self-interest. We need decision-makers that think European or even better global.

Take the refugee crisis for instance. Would Germany be the only country to have given the right answer to this tremendous challenge? Would all the other European partners be wrong?

If survival depends on solidarity and cooperation, then we are well-advised to take our partners views into account.

Strategic European thinking requires a 360° approach to problem-solving. Why should the Dutch or the British feel and think like the Germans? And do the Germans always know what they feel and think themselves? Do the others possibly have a point? Could there have been a more inclusive rapid response to the acute difficulty? However, blackmailing partners like Hungary has done it cannot be the solution either.

Be it as it may, it is also true that the smallest common denominator won’t be enough to tackle this crisis, any major crisis.
The point I want to make is that we need more 360 degree thinking.

Solidarity is a very practical issue. Just to give you an example, take the Barcelona process, launched in the early 1990s.

The Mediterranean Union France was advocating for has never come into view let alone into existence also because Germany always suspected France of pursuing its own national self-interest in a classic zone of influence.

Vice versa the same was happening regarding Central and Eastern Europe. That was of less interest to the French and they thought it was mainly a German issue.

The results of such narrow-minded national thinking, sadly, are now all too obvious. And these unintended results are endangering everything now that has been achieved after the war.

The European project already damaged in the Iraq war and seriously undermined in the Euro crisis needs new success stories.

The only way to get there is, using the terms of the treaty, by enhanced cooperation. Member states that want to go ahead must be able to do so. Others can follow when they are and feel ready.

Solidarity prevails when it shows positive effects. Solidarity undeniably depends on shared values but not less on common rules. It cannot function on a ad-hoc basis.

There are some key fields in which we ought to think big:

1. Europe needs a consistent asylum and migration policy and full and effective control over its external borders. There must be legal ways of migration, and we cannot accept that people die at our borders.

2. The EU must strengthen its foreign and security policy and its neighborhood policies. Foreign policy must be based on diplomacy and fair trade but it is evident that we cannot hope to project stability into our neighbourhood without credible military power.

3. The Monetary Union cannot be maintained without solidarity mechanisms. A fiscal capacity functioning as automatic stabilizer and sustainable answers to the sovereign debt problem are indispensable.

4. It is not only the Euro that requires solidarity. The Internal Market necessarily leads to a convergence of social framework conditions. If labour is a key factor in every market, then convergence in social security and labour law logically follow the European process of market formation.

5. We must take the citizens with us on this perilous and yet promising journey. Thus, democracy must be made more complete at the European level. The European treaty with its articles 11 and 12 paths the way for more legitimacy of solidarity at the European level.

To conclude, solidarity in Europe is fading but we should not accept this. We must urgently stop and reverse this fatal development.