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Solidarity in Europe – A Myth or a Reality?

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Abstract

European Union as a rightful successor to the entity previously known as Europe, is essentially a project, which due to its very nature, will remain a work in progress, transiting from one challenge to the next, in pursuit of an elusive equilibrium which meets the aspirations and needs of diverse population that inhabit and thrive within its ever expanding borders.

As an essential condition to the continuous existence and well-being of this voluntary Union, Solidarity is intrinsic to the harmonious functioning of the society at all levels, spanning the entire spectrum – starting from an individual level to the family, local, district, regional, national & multi-national and up to the entire Union.

This paper addresses the core question of whether the EU solidarity is an on-going reality which is continuously evolving or is it an accidental anomaly which strives to survive as it lurches from one crisis to the next?

It is an issue, which is extremely crucial not only for the existing member nation-states but also for the nations and regions aspiring to become part of this Union.

It is therefore imperative to fully comprehend the concept of solidarity and analyse if it is fully embraced by different participants within the EU, based on their respective roles and functions.

This paper critically looks at the three pillars (the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary) in all member states of the European Union, at all levels, which are held together by the underlying principle of solidarity and shared common values, which safeguard and assure the position of EU structures, under all circumstances.

It further highlights the extreme democratic mechanism by which each member nation-state contributes to the solidarity based on the capacity and state of its evolution, as the European Union remains a bedrock of peace and stability in the modern world.

Keywords:

Solidarity, European Union, Treaty, European Integration, Migration

INTRODUCTION

Solidarity can be understood as a profound source of humanity, intrinsic to the very core of being *human* and is continuously reflected in the harmonious functioning of the society at all levels, spanning the entire spectrum – starting from an individual level to the family, local, district, regional, national & multi-national and up to the various unions or organisations.

Solidarity can further be defined as a united agreement amongst a group of people with common interests and mutual support. It is often presented as a sociological concept that evokes the common feeling of community, a sense of responsibility that is reciprocated amongst members of the group, ensuring human dignity, human rights and human values.

From the perspective of governments or nation states, the term solidarity has been explained by Stjernø as “the preparedness to share resources with others by personal contribution to those in struggle or in need through taxation and redistribution organised by the state” (Stjernø, 2005).

Solidarity in the World

From the ancient human civilisations which were more often based on intra and inter tribal solidarity right up to the modern Nation States, which were formalised in the United Nations Charter (UN, 1945), present day societies have been evolved around homogenous groups of people sharing certain common values, language, religion, ethnicity, customs and traditions in mostly distinct geographical boundaries.

The UN has delivered a platform, for the inter-national / inter-governmental cooperation and the broad solidarity of nations, which has led to extraordinary development and prosperity for several groups of population in the World (*the organising principle of harmony*). However, many events over the last seven decades have also resulted in continuing stark disparity, inequality, disaster and violent conflicts within societies and between different regions of the World (*the organising principle of chaos*), which recur regularly and the UN, in spite of its promise and potential, due to the prevalence of reactive mind-set and predominance of the status quo in its present form and structure, seems unable to cope and deliver, barring calamity relief and conflict mitigation.

Solidarity in Europe – European Union shows the way

In this paper, I will start by first providing historical reasons why and how solidarity was unleashed in the small community of few European nations in the first place and subsequently in the larger union of European nations. The article will further discuss the different forms of Solidarity and various specific milestone measures taken by the EU. Further, it looks at its evolution over the years.

Having emerged from the debilitating effects of the catastrophic events surrounding the World War II, the founders of the present day European Union (initially the ECSC – the European Community in 1951) foresaw the handicaps of the UN structure and forged ahead with the formation of Community of European Nation Sates, based on the principle of Solidarity at all levels of member societies.

In many ways, the European Union as an ever evolving and expanding union of nation states and regions, has demonstrably delivered peace, stability, economic prosperity and well being to the inhabitants of this Union, while practically overcoming the limitations of the present UN structure.

It shows the promise to eventually emerge, through deliberations, debates, compromises and evolution, as an effective and functioning model, to govern human affairs in diverse societies.

From its very inception, there is an on-going discourse on the issue of solidarity in post WWII Europe. When we talk of solidarity, there are many questions that come naturally to our mind, such as, does solidarity exists amongst all the member states of the EU? What kind of solidarity is required to make the union stronger to overcome the on-going social, economic and political challenges?

As with each challenge that confronts the EU, the question of solidarity has been raised over and over again within all EU member states. It becomes relevant to understand if all member states feel committed and equally responsible to participate in overcoming the challenges in a collective manner or is just a zero sum game, as seen by others.

There have been number of studies performed by leading scholars from different fields of scientific inquiry, who have looked at various aspects of solidarity in the EU.

On the whole, this article is an attempt to focus on the EU project, which is continuously evolving, and which is able to foster a feeling of solidarity against all odds that has enabled it to confront and successfully face off seemingly insurmountable challenges and emerge stronger.

Why Solidarity Matters?

The principle of solidarity has been an integral part of the European integration law from the very beginning (1951) and is further strengthened by the Treaty of Lisbon (2007).

I am striving to address the following four questions, which I believe are very relevant for a clear understanding and overview of the core purpose of the EU, an increasingly vast organization, which remains both voluntary and unique.

- Is EU solidarity an on-going reality, which is continuously evolving, or is it an accidental anomaly that strives to survive as the EU lurches from one crisis to the next?
- What is the guiding principle of solidarity and is it fully embraced by different participants within the EU, based on their respective roles and functions?
- Does membership in the EU continue to be an aspiration for other nations and regions to join, irrespective of the current situation in the EU and state of affairs in the individual member states?
- Are the underlying principles of solidarity and shared common values, as supported and defended by the democratic pillars of the EU at all levels of every society in each member state (the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary) able to safeguard and assure the position of the EU structures under all circumstances?

The continued success of the EU project based on the foundation of solidarity has become extremely crucial issue not only for the existing member nation-states but also for the aspiring nations and regions, with a very strong appetite

for becoming part of this union. It is therefore imperative to fully comprehend if and how the concept of solidarity is embraced amongst different participants within the EU, based on their respective roles and functions.

SOLIDARITY IN THE EU

Development of Solidarity in the EU: A brief history

In this section, I will go through a brief outline of the Milestones events (concrete achievements) in the evolution of the EU Project. The European Union which today is made up of 28 states with a population of over half a billion people has come a long way. The idea of Solidarity initially was not based on a unifying dream of European federalist, but motivated by avoiding the preceding horrors of the WW-II and the emerging threat of the Soviet Union to the Western European countries, through peaceful cooperation between European nation states, based on enlightened self interest.

Now, solidarity is a founding value of the EU, Article 2 TEU (Treaty of European Union), and many provisions in the TEU refer to solidarity between member states and their peoples, for example Articles 1(3), 3 (3), 24 (2) and (3), 31 (1) TEU.

In the words of Robert Schuman “Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity” (The Schuman Declaration, 1950).

Formation Years of the European Community, Years 1951 – 57.

After the World War (WW) II, leaders in Europe realized that a solidary based integration project might greatly reduce the risk of a fall back into conflicts and war, and create a new sense of cohesion and powerful cooperation. When Robert Schuman referred to “solidarity of fact” he made a plea for solidarity as a main construction element for European integration, to be applied both with modesty and determination. The idea was to be mutually dependent by sharing economic and political bonds. In 1951, it started by forming the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). In 1956, the European Economic Community (EEC) was formed with six core nation-sates namely Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands & Luxembourg. This first move towards Super nationalism was realised in order to avoid any further conflict amongst nations and develop more stability and cohesion, thereby providing a counter balance to the primacy of nation state inter-governmentalism of earlier decades.

The Succession Period, Years 1958 – 85/86

In 1963, it established a doctrine of direct effect - European legislation applied directly to the Citizen, different from other international organisations due to the direct relationship between the union legislation and the Citizen. In 1964, the doctrine of supremacy - European legislation is supreme over national legislation. In 1974, the European council was set up and an active form of solidarity was demonstrated by the EEC leaders by setting up the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This was developed to transfer resources from rich to poor regions with an objective to not only improve the infrastructure but also to attract investment and create new jobs. Commitment to foundation principles and values became a prerequisite for future membership to the EEC.

Regeneration and Politicisation Period, Years 1986 – till date

European Monetary system was formally incorporated, including the environmental and social policy. The “Maastricht Treaty” on European Union (signed in 1992, effective in 1993) and the “Treaty of Amsterdam” in 1999, enforced the idea on how Europeans could act together on issues of environment protection and on the matters of security and defence. Treaty of Maastricht and the CFSP (Common foreign and security policy) undertakes that “member states will support EU external and security policy in a spirit of loyalty and solidarity” (Article J.1.4). Solidarity is based on common European values and norms with an objective to unite not just the member nation states but mainly its citizens.

From 1990 to 1999 was the period of Europe without frontiers. The Year 1993 was particularly significant as it marked the beginning of the EU with Single market based on freedom of movement of goods, services, people and capital between the member nation states.

By the Treaty of Maastricht, a Cohesion Fund was created which became operative in 1994. “In order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion” (Moussis, 1997).

The Institutional Foundations of the European Union

In the EU, relevant legislation is passed on the supranational level, which supersedes the laws passed on national level, and it is initiated, approved and implemented through its different branches, which are the Executive, the Legislative and the Judicial branch. The Executive branch is divided into three divisions – the European council, the European Commission and the Council of ministers (limited powers). The Legislative branch comprises of the European Parliament (directly elected by citizens) and the Council of European Union (council of ministers, representing executive governments of the member states). Under the Judicial branch is the Court of justice of the EU.

In 2007, Treaty of Lisbon (ToL) was signed and brought major reforms to the union and acted like a constitution. Aim of the Lisbon treaty was to strengthen EU wide employment, economic reform and create a knowledge economy. In early 2009, ToL came up with the new Solidarity Clause, namely the Common Defence, which states that “the Union and its Members act jointly if they are the target of a terrorist attack or the victim of a disaster. Common European defence as a goal - new possibilities of closer cooperation in the field of defence among member states which are able and willing to do so.” (European Commission, January 2008). This clause was for the first time invoked by the French Government following the recent terrorist attacks in Paris in Nov. 2015.

As EU has been expanding, ToL has been signed by all member states with an agenda to make the functioning of European Union more democratic and transparent amongst other factors. This enabled the decision making process in urgent matters simpler and efficient. Another very important aspect of this Treaty was that it reaches down not only to the member states but to the grass-root level and strengthens their rights, as the citizens of the EU, especially through the mechanism of European Citizens Initiative (ECI).

The Lisbon Treaty has advanced the legal construction of this concept by completing a three-dimensional understanding of solidarity: solidarity between member states, between member states and individuals, and now also between generations.

Societies in Transition - Solidarity in Action

The European solidarity and integration over the last 70 years can be broadly defined as the process of industrial, political, legal, economic, social and cultural integration of states and its people, which are wholly or partially anchored in the European Continent. The present form of European Solidarity has primarily come about through the European Union, its treaties, policies and mechanisms. The EU enlargement is not an easy process, since more the members, more the differences in perceptions, opinions and needs. Overcoming all these differences is a continuous work in progress. In some policy areas, there is higher consensus among member states as compared to other areas. Understandably, each member is loyal to its own state, further some member states show greater affinity with certain other states with the common denominator being the shared historical and cultural experiences.

The Pro-European Identity

The European Union being a voluntary organisation has attracted and continues to attract more members due to several factors.

First and foremost is the idea of shared common values leading to stability and strength in unity. Member state and its residents in turn benefit in many areas especially economic, social, cultural, political, legal, scientific and security.

Presented below are few results from the survey conducted by Eurobarometer to analyse if solidarity is an essential value perceived by the member states and if they feel sense of pride and need for being a member of the EU.

In Figure 1, there is a noticeable trend which shows a continuing preference towards solidarity as compared to individualism.

QA20. And in 2030, in the EU, would you prefer a society where more importance is given to solidarity or to individualism?

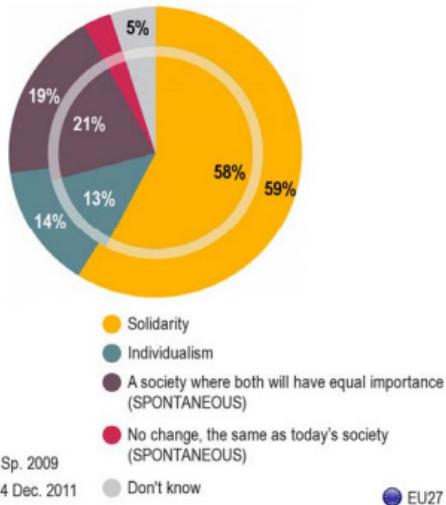


Figure 1, Special Eurobarometer 379, “Future of Europe” (2012)

The pie chart (See Figure1) clearly depicts that all respondents from all categories express a desire in the future for a cohesive society throughout the European Union. The survey therefore indicates that Europeans still want a society in which solidarity is more important, results indicated the preference for solidarity remains just as strong: around six out of ten Europeans choose solidarity (59%; +1) over individualism (14%; +1)

Further, how important solidarity is for the members is evident (see Figure 2), when they are asked to select two items which European society should emphasise in order to face major global challenges: ‘social equality and solidarity’ is chosen most frequently (45%), ahead of protecting the environment (36%), progress and innovation (35%) Excerpt of the Special Eurobarometer 379, “Future of Europe” (2012), pp. 72

QA13. From the following items, which two should our society emphasise in order to face major global challenges?

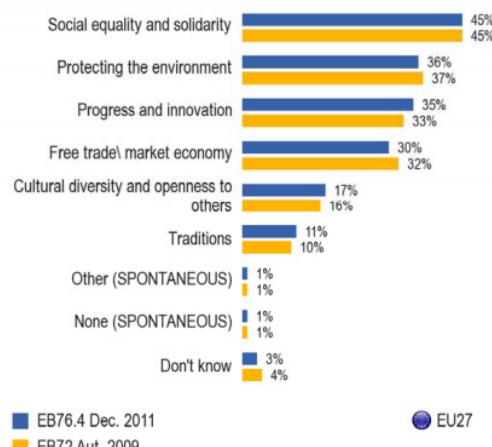


Figure 2, Special Eurobarometer 379, “Future of Europe”(2012)

Figure 3 reflects answers to a question on European identity. It is interesting to note that the majority of EU citizens see themselves in the future, as both national as well as European citizens, which implies that they have developed Europeanized national identities. The main dividing line is between the minority of those who identify exclusively with their nation-state, on the one hand, and those who add Europe as a secondary identity, on the other.

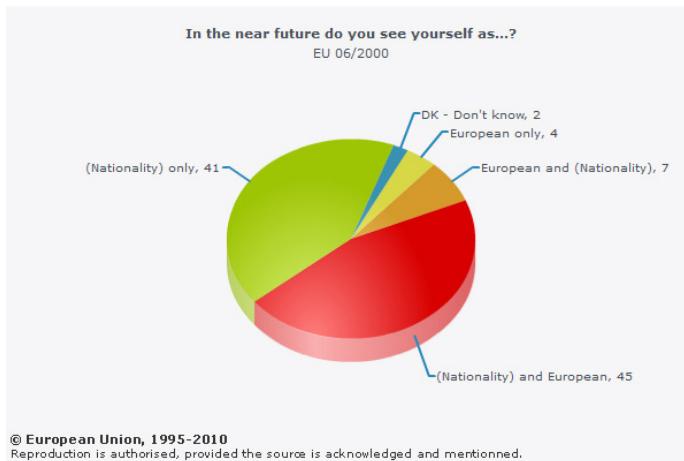


Figure 3. European Commission Eurobarometer survey.

The more people identify with Europe, the more they are prepared to support economic governance with redistributive consequences. As to the euro-zone, majorities of citizens support giving financial help to another EU member state facing economic and financial difficulties (European Parliament, 2011).

Figure 4 is a more recent survey, depicting the larger portion of the pie to be positive or neutral in response to the question of how the public see their life in general as part of the EU.

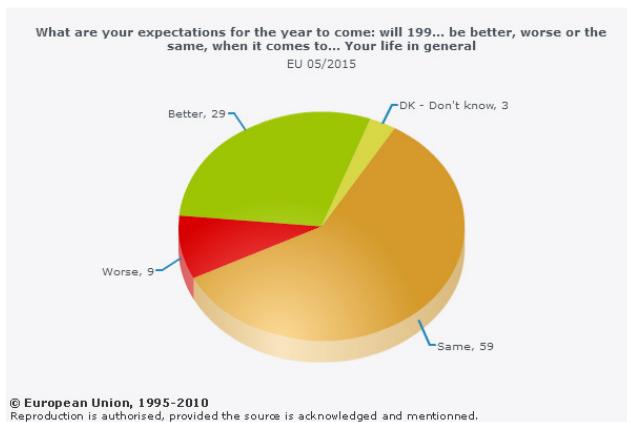


Figure 4. European Commission Eurobarometer survey.

Standard Eurobarometer survey, conducted in November 2014 (EB82), reflects that the trust and support for the EU has generally improved as a majority of Europeans are found to have a positive image of the EU. This study is noteworthy as there has been an incremental improvement in the mindset of the people, since spring 2011, where feeling of neutrality have moved to that of positivity towards EU (EuroBarometer, 2014).

This strengthening of the diffuse support of the EU across Europe's population creates a pool of favourable perceptions which further contribute towards shared solidarity and desired outcomes, both within the EU as well as outside.

Solidarity in Action

Demographic changes- Aging society, Diversity and Immigration: Some demographic changes, such as Europe's shrinking population, predominantly getting older alongside becoming more diverse and multi-ethnic. Europe is also experiencing an influx of migrants, both skilled and unskilled which is causing anxiety mainly with respect to race, ethnicity, language, dialect or more prominent differences such as their religious affiliations or cultural orientation to name a few. With inputs from member states, the evolving EU wide comprehensive integration strategy for immigrants (especially non-EU, third country migrants) is steadily helping overcome the unprecedented apprehension amongst parts of the host populations on this issue and its likely effect on their (European) way of life & wellbeing.

An interesting research conducted by Stiftung shows how the German states in fact benefit from inflow of migrants. "Welfare state profits from migration, Foreign-born individuals currently living in Germany ensured a net fiscal

surplus of € 22 billion in 2012. With more investments in education and a stronger focus on skilled migrants, Germany could continuously profit from migration." (Bertelsmann Stiftung).

As the EU project evolved over the years, there have been a number of mechanisms and policies implemented with an object to foster different facets of solidarity. Few amongst them are –

Solidarity between generations was one of the dimensions of solidarity introduced by The Lisbon Treaty. It reflects an awareness of responsibility towards present and future generations, due to the unprecedented demographic changes in the European population which is an established ongoing process, directly leading to outcomes, such as an incremental decrease in the working population and thereby challenging the sustainability of social security & pension systems in all European societies and higher demand for healthcare services to name a few. Since societies are not static and are undergoing constant changes, the issue of solidarity becomes more real than ever. Due to increase in the life span of the aging population, the EU and national governments are coming up with innovative policies that will result in economic benefit for the society by involving the older generation (Eurostat, 2012).

Solidarity in Free Movement of Persons, Capital, Goods & Services - The Schengen Area (a Border free area within the EU effective from 1999) allows free movement for more than 400 million EU citizens from 26 European countries including four of which are not members of the EU to travel without internal border controls (europa.eu, 2009).

In the words of Cecilia Malmström, the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs (2010-2014), "Schengen is one of the most valued and concrete European achievements. It is widely cherished by EU's citizens and makes a major contribution to our economic prosperity. The question of how we can strengthen our cooperation and safeguard free movement is extremely important. We owe it to our citizens to make sure Schengen remains an area without border controls."

Raspotnik has described the different solidarities (Financial, Energy, Asylum and Border management) that fall under the umbrella of the European agenda (Raspotnik et al., 2012).

Financial solidarity - Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 gave birth to the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which gave rise to the Cohesion Fund. This was followed by the Euro-Currency Project (Eurozone) and the European Central Bank (ECB). Budget and distribution solidarity based on the negotiations relating to the EU's longer-term budget, 2014 – 2020 (Raspotnik et al. 2012).

Most recently, the unprecedented pressure on the Euro in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008-2009 and thereafter the Greek sovereign debt crisis, has brought successful financial solidarity between the member states into sharp focus.

Energy solidarity - The EU energy policy has taken variety of measures to ensure and achieve an integrated energy market with three core objectives: sustainability, competitiveness and security of supply. The energy policy aims to create solidarity in the energy sector between member states, for example to (a) ensure the transparent functioning of the energy markets, (b) security of energy supply and (c) the development of new and renewable forms of energy (Fact sheets on EU) including the diversification of the EU's energy mix, and the integration of energy networks & markets ((Raspotnik et al. 2012).

Immigration Solidarity: Asylum and border management - Solidarity on asylum and border management within the EU has a direct relation to free movement within the Schengen Area. Whereas the Tampere Programme (1999-2004) had laid the groundwork for the creation of European asylum policy and for a harmonisation of the border management legislation, the Schengen Area, is a standing symbol of free movement within the EU.

Here elements of both external and internal solidarity combine in an exceptional way.

Externally the EU and member states demonstrate solidarity with international refugees who, according to the Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951 are defined as individuals who are unwilling to return to their home country "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion"(Geneva Refugee Convention,1951).

In view of the extraordinary migrant influx of 2015, the Dublin III Regulations (2013) mechanism needs appropriate revision and pragmatic support of all the member states, to meet challenges of the present as well as the future migrations. As always, this evolution of EU-wide harmonised immigration would be guided by the principles of common shared values of the EU.

Regional Solidarity is delivered through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund. National and regional authorities, in cooperation with the European Commission, are responsible for managing the funds from day to day. Between 2007 and 2012, regional policy helped EU countries create 769 000 jobs, invest in

225 000 smaller businesses, fund 72 000 research projects, bring broadband coverage to 5 million more EU Citizen, improve quality of life in cities through 11 000 different projects.

European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) was set up after major natural disasters and help was extended to those affected by it. Examples: Flooding in 2002, in the Czech Republic; Flooding of August 2005 in Austria; Forest Fires of 2007 in Greece; Abruzzo Earthquake of April 2009 in Italy; Beyond Europe- The Asian Tsunami Disaster in 2004.

In all different cases, whether it was flooding or the tsunami cases, member states were vigilant in sending relief material and experts as per their specialization in disaster relief. The eagerness of member states to contribute on their own way based on their capacity implies a strong sense of solidarity amongst them at the time of acute crisis and even going beyond Europe on a humanitarian basis reaching out to those in need by crossing all borders.

The European Union is, together with its Member States, the world's greatest provider of development aid totalling over 50 billion euro annually. Development aid is an important albeit by far not the only part of development cooperation which consists of many other economic, political, social and cultural elements.

Social Solidarity and intra-EU mobility of workers - This notion of solidarity is linked to intra-EU labour mobility since at its core lies the opening of national labour markets to workers from other EU countries. The free movement of workers is one of the fundamental rights guaranteed to EU nationals by the Treaty of Rome. Accession Treaties of 2003 and 2005 allowed member states to introduce transitional restrictions for 2004 and 2007 enlargements in order to gradually open their market with Malta and Cyprus being the exception (European Commission, 2006).

European Social Fund (ESF) is EU's main tool across Europe in improving the employment opportunities, promoting social inclusion and investing in skills by providing help people need to fulfil their potential. By focussing on people and their skills, it has actually increased geographical and occupational mobility, for the employed as well as the jobless, both young and old.

Civil Solidarity – One of the important attributes of the Lisbon Treaty was an introduction of the European Citizens Initiative (ECI), as it directly involves and affects the citizens at the grassroots level, thereby promoting direct democracy and helping mitigate the democratic deficit in the functioning of the supranational polity of the EU. Based on the specific proposals put forth by the European citizen's to the commission, provided they are one million in number from at least seven countries (1/4 of member states), a new proposal can actually lead to legislation being initiated by the European Commission, and eventually it coming into force.

Barriers to Solidarity

The key obstacles or barriers which hinder meaningful European integration, and which stand in the way of delivering the full potential of the Solidarity are:

Competitiveness: Enhanced competitiveness through the reduction of the "burden" of excessive regulation and extending the single market: fragmented national tax systems impede market integration and undermine efficiency; separate national markets still exist for financial services; energy and transport.

Economic governance: While recognising the need for multiple currency regimes in various nation states of the EU, there is the need to further optimise the economic governance and performance in the eurozone area with time bound steps to further financial union with increasingly coordinated and ultimately common fiscal policy inside eurozone. The financial services market is a special case. The EU is seeking to build a strong, secure financial sector — while avoiding a repeat of the 2009 crisis — by supervising financial institutions, regulating complex financial products and requiring banks to hold more capital. The creation of the banking union transferred the mechanisms for bank supervision and resolution from national to EU level in several member countries.

Immigration: To unleash the full human capital potential of the EU residents, through the full implementation of the basic EU principle of free movement of persons in a non-discriminatory manner with fair and transparent rules for access to in-work and out-of-work benefits to intra-EU migrants. Further, rules on the recognition of vocational qualifications need to be simplified to make it easier for qualified workers to find a job in another EU country.

Sovereignty: For an "ever closer union" of the peoples and nations of Europe and beyond, through further political, economic and social integration, by pragmatically and transparently achieving mutually complementary layers of structures relating to foreign affairs, external defence, internal affairs, justice and security. National parliaments as symbols of sovereign nation states to increasingly become integrated in the EU structures as one of the building blocks of the EU democracy.

Tests of endurance

In the past, events of 1960's and the unstable political and economic crisis of the 70's was challenging for the Commission, and led to what was called as the "Eurosclerosis". The political turbulence during this time led to the belief that the system will come crumbling down. Member states managed to overcome it with the Single market act of 1986 and followed by the treaties which reinforced the notion of integration.

Solidarity crisis was further intensified by both economic challenges of re-united Germany and external forces, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union as a bloc, the war in ex-Yugoslavia in the 1990's, all of which brought large waves of refugees and immigrants from the central and east Europe, including Balkans all of which led to rise in unemployment in the early 2000's. Further lack of unity amongst member states came to fore on the issue of war in Iraq in 2003, the Economic System Challenge -fiscal policy integration to offset economic asymmetry and various crisis dramas like the Economic crisis of 2008-2009, Eurozone and the Greek debt crisis.

There are then the Institutional Architecture Challenges (the EU system of Governance is continuously evolving, unlike the UN, to meet the needs and aspirations of all its inhabitants; promote economic recovery, growth and stability in all member states of the Union; overcoming mutual antagonism of member nation states); the Geopolitical Challenges-the Ukraine conflict; the Turkish membership conundrum; the Balkan countries; the Internal Security Challenge and the more recent events relating to the extra-ordinary refugee migration into Europe, the Paris security crisis; Schengen (borderless space since 1998 for free movement of people and goods)

As we can see, EU has gone through in the past and continues to go through demanding times where its integrity and purposefulness has been challenged both externally by state/non-state actors as well as internally especially by a small but vocal euro-sceptic population.

The European Unity and the Peace Dividend

Due to the conscious choices made by the Nation states of Europe and the deliberate development of various European institutions, the Unity and Peace dividend and has delivered inclusive development, economic growth, better standard of living and quality of life for its inhabitants.

Each member nation-state contributes to the solidarity at all levels, whether within its national society or within the larger society of the European Union, based on the capacity and state of its evolution, while at the same time being part and parcel of the extreme democratic mechanism which makes the European Union a bedrock of peace and stability in the modern world.

EU – In Solidarity with the World

Repeatedly, the European Union has been able to recover through difficult phases and emerge stronger, which has created its capacity to project it's Solidarity with the World at large and enabled it to increasingly and continuously contribute towards important global joint decisions.

The EU has become a unique entity. Even though at present it has no seat in the UN, no armed forces, no embassies in foreign countries, no directly elected president, not a nation, but it has support of its member states, through collective membership. In WTO, EC represents EU members states, which also have their own independent membership, but EU has a wide presence in the world as it provides aid in the fields of peace, education and health and economic support to those in need and leads on environmental action issues.

A look at some related theories and secondary research

For this article, I will take selected theories, to explain the concept of European Solidarity and resulting Integration.

Functionalist approach is associated mainly with the work of David Mitrany, who wished for a peaceful world after the second world war and therefore promoted the concept of functional cooperation across states which led to better integration during the 50's and the 60's. For him, understanding of the International society that was forming was from the point of view of understanding the essential functions it serves (Mitrany, 1976).

Neo functionalism developed by Ernst Haas was borne from the ideas of the functionalist theory. For integration to continue it had to be expanded from one area, which he described as the “expansive logic of European Integration” (Hass, 1961). Although the theory could explain initial success of integration , it was criticised for its uni-directional logic during the crisis of 70's.

One of the explanations for European integration and reasons why individual states rested its power in the supranational was seen by Moravcsik (1994) in what he called Liberal intergovernmentalism. For him, “EU is a successful intergovernmental regime designed to manage economic interdependence through negotiated policy co-ordination.” National actors make the final decision . This theories emphasis on the role of interests of the national governments who play a main role in shaping European integration but has its shortcoming as its found to be state-centric.

Social constructivists on the other hand have explained integration on the basis on identity, which can bring about the political discourse on the question of European identity by bring a new insight on loyalty, socialisation and perception of reality for the actors. It is criticised for lacking a proper methodology.

There has been an immense amount of research conducted by scholars from different disciplines on the topic of solidarity. Think tanks, organizations, governmental bodies are all providing information on various aspects of Solidarity. I have put together a collection of few publications which I found relevant for this article.

Risse, in his book, “A community of Europeans”, has discussed in depth the concept of European identity and its link to the national identity. Risse has rejected the conventional idea that Europeans lack a sense of community and believes that “Europe and the EU are integrated in people’s sense of belonging.” Social solidarity is “a collectively shared social constructions linking to individuals to social group, national or super national imagined community.” Europeanization, he explains refers to the extent to which national identities associate themselves with European identity. According to him, there is a gap in the mind-set of the masses, one who exclusively identify with their nation states ‘Exclusive nationalists’ and those who identify with Europe as their secondary identity- ‘Inclusive nationalists’. Further, in order to explain the nationals holding multiple identities, an interesting anomaly is provided to an onion peel, where everyone in a smaller community is also part of a larger community and identifies with it. In other words, local citizens feel a sense of nationalism on one hand along with a extended feeling of European citizenship.

Risse has also cautioned that in every society, there is the so-called power seeking elites who would reconstruct identities that it would suit their interests, which plays a politically instrumental role. He has suggested that by using the term Europe and EU interchangeably, EU tends to occupy a social space, which creates for its members an identity platform and becomes an inherent factor in order to feel European.

Schelke in his work titled “Can there be a European social Model?” has studied reforms towards unemployment benefits and employment protection in four member states and believes that a ESM is conceivable but there are political and economic factors that cause hindrance to it to emerge. European Social Model (ESM) for him is the ‘political norms and economic functions that a certain welfare state arrangement satisfies primarily’.

Ross and Borgmann in their paper on promoting Solidarity in the European Union have examined the concept of solidarity and its relation to 'opportunities' and 'access'. They have argued that solidarity is employed to serve a variety of functions ranging from, at a meta-level, an objective of EU social policy to, at a more micro-level, an instrument to help foster cohesion and community, particularly through the use of structural funds.

Authors of Notre Europe, an independent think tank, under the guidance of Jacques Delors, in their project on European Solidarity, describe the notion of solidarity to be ambiguous.

Ekengren et al. have explained in their article, the spirit of nationalism and sovereignty, and that of solidarity that is found amongst member states by providing examples from two case studies where member states, at the time of crisis controlled power in extending support to the affected area, which in turn had an impact on the issue of solidarity.

Thomas Risse (Risse, 2010) has raised two interesting questions - Are European citizens prepared to pay a price for their loyalty and to accept (re-) distributive policies on the European level as they do in their national polities. In an attempt to answer these questions, which he agrees requires and demands empirical data, he argues a very interesting concept of Europeanization of the national identities. According to him, a majority of European citizens has developed dual identities – to their nation-state and to Europe – and this Europeanization of national identities is sufficient to sustain carefully crafted (re-) distributive policies on the European level; and the euro crisis has strongly increased the politicization of national public spheres and has led to their growing Europeanization with regard to issue salience and to the actors represented.

Gerhards and Lengfeld (2013) have shown that social integration in the EU is on the rise. Times-series data from Poland, Germany and Spain demonstrate that EU Citizen grant each other equal political and social rights, including access to social benefits and the welfare state.

Over the past 15 years, many empirical studies have demonstrated that we are witnessing the gradual Europeanization of public spheres.

Summary and Conclusion

In recent times, the EU is facing many challenges, whether it is the Greek economic crisis, which despite some financial assistance continues to be highly critical or the geopolitical tensions at the Eastern border, namely the conflict in Ukraine. There is an on-going discourse on the question of inclusion of Turkey to be a member. Alongside, there has been a massive influx of the refugees in 2015, mainly coming from Syria, Eritrea, Iraq and Afghanistan, has gravely challenged the spirit of unity and solidarity in the EU.

Some of the individual member states are seemingly unable to cope with these developing situations and only through further capacity building, transparent mechanisms as well as meaningful common action, would further support and enhance the existing unity and solidarity amongst EU nations.

No human organisation is perfect and the EU is no exception. New challenges are meant to be opportunities of learning how to cope with them and to be proactive to avoid situations which leads to loss of life, loss of face and critical moral dilemma. As the EU strives to be an ever-perfect union, there are many leaders in its ranks at all levels, who are constantly looking at various scenarios and possibilities to make it work better and respond to the needs and aspirations of its residents.

As often stated, the EU is a work in progress, which is evident from what present EU Commission President Juncker had to say on the question of solidarity, at the opening session of the 13th Conference of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC, 2015) in Paris, which mentioned several areas in which there was a particular need for solidarity:

- Solidarity, too, as regards the right to work and the principle which should be applied throughout Europe, namely equal pay for equal work at the same place of work;
- Solidarity on taxation, based on the principle that profits should be taxed where they are made.

There are many projects which are underway, to improve quality of the life in the EU and to remove barriers to stronger solidarity amongst nation states and its people. One example of the projects organised is strengthening and connecting Europe, which fosters partnership between different EU members on the idea of equality and solidarity amongst all nation states. The main purpose of this project is to strengthen the ideals on which EU has formed (Bertelsmann-Stiftung).

In context of Europe and its place in a globalized world, returning to the question as to “Why Solidarity Matters”, it is positively evident that –

- EU solidarity is an on-going reality, which is continuously evolving, and which is reconfirmed based on the survey conducted by Eurobarometer, which depicts that social equality and solidarity have the highest support amongst the European citizens, to enable European societies face global challenges (ref. Fig 2).
- The guiding principle of solidarity is fully embraced by different participants (member states, regions, residents etc.) within the EU, based on their respective roles and functions, through deeper economic cooperation, based on the principles of free market, liberal democracy, rule of law, as well as free movement of people, capital, goods and services across the entire EU area.
- Membership in the EU continues to be highly aspirational for other nations and regions, irrespective of the current situation in the EU and despite the controversy with the UK. There are on-going negotiations, especially with the acceding and candidate countries, such as from the Balkan Region Countries (ex-Yugoslavia) and Countries on the Eastern flank of the EU.
- The underlying principles of solidarity and shared common values, are very well supported and defended by the democratic pillars of the EU at all levels of every society in each member state as well as at the Union level through its seven foundation institutions, which are continuously evolving and adapting, thereby being able to safeguard and assure the position of the EU structures under all circumstances.

The fundamental shared common values which led to the establishment of this Union and which are its foundation building blocks, allowing it to thrive and expand in the present World: Solidarity, Freedom, Liberal Democracy and

Rule of Law, Free Market Economy (free movement of persons, goods, capital, services), Respect for Individual Human Rights and Dignity.

EU remains a unique and unparalleled project in the human history, a voluntary integration of people and nations, bound together by common values, and as any human project, it is and will always be, a work in progress, continuing on an unfinished journey delivering well being and prosperity to its people, as it battles against both internal and external pressures. Whether at the time of its inception as ECSC (1951), as EEC (1958), and as EU (1992/93), this Union of nation states has been always under massive stress, which each time changes its origin, form, or intensity. The Union has successfully coped with such stress in the past and would always meet newer, evolving challenges through continuous capacity building (both in terms of mechanisms as well as the institutions), based on the guiding principles of its fundamental values.

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