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QUO VADIS, EUROPE?

OUT OF THE BLUE

Anno domini 1951, the visionaries laid the foundations of their ambitious dream on the ruins of post-war Europe with an idealistic message. Now the countries and states of Europe would come under the auspices of an institution that would bring democracy, rights and security for all, reaching to the farthest corners of the continent. With this message, they wanted to bring together religions, skin colours and cultures into a single homogeneous union. Strengthened by the horrors they had experienced, the people set about their painstaking work with a vision of a better future.

In 1993, after the jangling of keys on the square and the separation from the Czech Republic, the independent Slovak Republic saw the light of day, and the European Union as we know it today came into existence.

(I was born in 1996).

In 2004 the greatest EU enlargement to date took place, and a notional 10 stars were added to the European flag, including one for Slovakia.

VIVAT UNION! RINGS OUT FROM SLOVAKIA

A magnet with the European Union logo, a diary with a motif of the European Union and a pile of brochures: these are just a fraction of the things that remind me of my participation in last year's Young European competition. I must admit, I would not voluntarily Google the names Schuman and De Gasperi. Let's be honest, these names mean something to only a handful of people (especially among my peers), and this is the harsh reality.

Despite all the promotional material, Slovak interest in the European Union is very low. Does the older generation still dream of the socialist ideal and their youth? (I will come to this later). This claim is supported by the fact that Slovak participation in the EP elections in 2014 was, at 13.1 %, the lowest amongst all the Member States!

We close our eyes to the billboards that proclaim: built with EU support. We believe that the new jobs that have been created arose through the will of the Good Samaritan. The politicians in Brussels seem to us to be Gods on Olympus who have little in common with us mere mortals. Ignorance is no defence. They will continue to needlessly spend money on raising awareness of the European Union until we are aware of the rights and obligations arising from our membership in the Union, in the belief that, as a small nation, we can do nothing and we will just go with the flow



like dead fish. The wheels of the European machine, however, continue to spin relentlessly.

YOUTH OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

My generation grew up pampered by peace. We were globalised from early childhood, and it would seem that Schuman's dream is becoming a reality; the French are offering the hand of friendship to the Romanians. Surely his dream would become a nightmare if he could see what an indifferent and ignorant approach we have? We take it for granted that we have open borders, a stable currency, free movement of capital and peace. Articles with headlines such as 'The biggest load of bureaucratic nonsense from the European Union in 2xxx' hide its true successes.

IN VARIETATE CONCORDIA

During my last visit to our European brethren, the Germans, I began to have serious doubts about my geographical knowledge. Slovakia is Slovenia and it is by the sea, a stone's throw from Croatia, right? I felt dizzy at the mention of our new capital city, Prague. The question as to whether I knew of the existence of Ikea was the final nail in the coffin. With sadness, I realised that to the West we are still a post-communist country, which may not even know what a market economy is. We are divided as a country and the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing! Or the right hand doesn't even exist at all...

AND THE PRIZE FOR HAVING THE MOST PATIENCE GOES TO...!

Turkey!

In one of his books, Orhan Pamuk describes Istanbul in the last century as a city that looked European, but did not have a European mentality. We are facing further enlargement of the Union. Quantity does not mean quality, and we have to think about where the limits of our expansion should be set. The eastern boundary could be closed, at least for a while. No, I don't want the European Union to become an elite economic club, but meeting the Copenhagen criteria is not the be all and end all. We are stubbornly continuing to construct a bridge, even though it is imperceptibly crumbling somewhere in the middle. The factors affecting the various countries during their development, and what has arisen from them, are in some cases so different that the gap cannot be bridged. Similarly, only a fool waits for the surface of a lake to be calm, whilst continuing to throw in more and more stones.

In the last Accession State to join, Croatia, 67 % of voters were in favour of entering the integration group, which is a decent number. The funny thing about this situation, however, is that not even half of all eligible voters took part in the referendum. Are we really such altruistic saviours as we would like to think?

We are no longer in a post-war Europe. The ideas that once held a group of countries together like glue need to be dusted off and updated, but will they provide us with answers to the question of: 'in which direction is the European Union heading?'