Shaping the Future - Europe's New Voices: a Communiqué after our seminar in Berlin; Berlin, 7-8 November 2013

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(based on the report by Chiara Rosselli)

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Berlin 7–8 November 2013
Alfred von Oppenheim Center for European Policy Studies
German Council on Foreign Relations
Berlin 2013

DGAP Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Auswärtige Politik e.V.

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DGAP Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V.

In cooperation with:

CIDOB BARCELONA CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

ΕΛΙΑΜΕΠ ELIAMEP

IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali

Stiftung Mercator

Alfred von Oppenheim Center for European Policy Studies

German Council on Foreign Relations

Berlin 2014

The Initiating Consortium

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The German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) is Germany's network for foreign policy. As an independent, nonpartisan, and nonprofit membership organization, think tank, and publisher the DGAP has been promoting public debate on foreign policy in Germany for over 50 years.

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The project

The European Union is undergoing a double transformation. Top-down, it is transforming in ways thought unthinkable only a few years ago. New rules for fiscal policies, a separate treaty to strengthen budgetary commitments, and plans for a banking and fiscal union are moving the Eurozone towards greater integration. Bottom-up, the crisis has given rise to a strand of new political and social movements, which challenge the foundations of national and European political systems as much as they suggest new approaches to governance and to foundations of our commonwealth.

European citizens suffer from the fallout of the international financial crisis, skyrocketing public debt as a consequence of the banking crisis, and subsequent pressures for major structural reforms. They feel the brunt of overspent welfare systems, soaring unemployment and anaemic or negative growth, while the prospect of fiscal redistribution at the European level remains uncertain.

Particularly in southern Europe, citizens have been raising their voice, questioning the loss of economic sovereignty coupled with austerity measures. Negative stereotypes of the "other" proliferate.

Northern European member states perceive their southern counterparts (and their citizens) as profligate and lazy, refusing to pay their own way out of the crisis. For their part, citizens from Southern member states have come to view northern Europeans as selfish and inward looking, having abandoned the ideals of European solidarity. This process does not only hamper pathways to joint solutions; it deeply undermines European integration as a shared project of mutual and trans-generational benefit. Many ask for new impulses to democracy and have started to explore ways of creating a future for themselves and their children.

Euroscepticism is not a new phenomenon, during the past 30 years, several movements have shaped their political identities on populist arguments to re-

spond to different international, political and economic challenges. However, the recent diffused political and economic malaise in Europe has generated the rise of new anti-establishment groups that are questioning the very foundations of the European project. This is a novel and potentially risky trend, because while previously representing extremist or fringe viewpoints, these movements' current criticism of the EU is receiving major support from a substantial part of those citizens badly hit by the negative repercussions of the crisis.

We are a consortium of four leading think tanks, IAI, CIDOB, ELIAMEP, DGAP and one foundation, Stiftung Mercator, joining forces to offer new openings for exchange and platforms for open dialogue between established political representatives and emerging voices across borders, parties, and parliaments. The broader aim of our initiative is to explore possible avenues towards the construction of a new European consensus—one that is ideally fit to help our generation switch gears from "crisis mode" to "solution mode," and one that can ultimately carry our children into our common future.

To this aim we hosted an interactive and innovative political seminar in Berlin on 7–8 November 2013 for 35 carefully scouted and personally invited members of parliaments, caucus leaders, and representatives of large social movements or civil society groups.

We invited them because we deem them key voices of today and tomorrow's Europe. They represented different worldviews, and come from different parties and countries: Italy, Spain, Germany, Greece, France, Portugal, Austria and Slovakia.

In the build up to this event IAI, ELIAMEP and CIDOB organized a series of workshops aimed at engaging anti-establishment parliamentarians and other political actors in an informal debate on European economic governance. Preparatory meetings were first organized to introduce these parties and movements to the work of the think tanks focusing on European affairs. Representatives of political and social forces such as the Five Star Movement (Italy), Syriza (Greece), Izquierda Unida, Democracia Real Ya, and Enred Madrid (Spain) amongst others were then invited to seminars organized in Rome, Barcelona, Madrid and Athens to discuss their views on the EU, the crisis and the policies pursued by the EU and the member states to exit the crisis with a number of external experts. Experts included economists, political scientists, activists and think tankers as well as members of the respective countries' foreign affairs committees. In an attempt to gauge the movements' concerns and positions regarding Europe's response to the crisis, the think tanks remained in listening mode whilst the experts provided a means for representatives to familiarize with the wider European debate.

An innovative approach for a new process of consensus building

The immediate aim of this unconventional, interactive seminar—with no panels and no powerpoint presentations—has been for members of parliament and leaders of social movements to learn more about the motivations, aims and visions of their European colleagues, friends—or foes, providing a setting for dialogue and for the cross-fertilization of ideas, experiences and visions.

"First things first, I am not a politician."

Participants displayed a considerable amount of enthusiasm at the opportunity to interact with their European colleagues, coupled with a manifest curiosity about the others and a willingness to better understand the realities affecting fellow member states. Initial introductions and dialogue were very straightforward and informal offering the unique chance for these professionals to interact first and foremost as individuals rather than strictly as representatives of one or another strand of political thought. One Spanish participant asks a Greek representative of the Independent Greeks "so you are like Syriza but on the right?." The Greek smiles, hinting that indeed that is to some extent the case. Many are self-proclaimed non-politicians who have assumed a politically active role in their societ-

ies driven by the depth of the crisis. The mix of these new voices alongside well-established party members and young voices from traditional parties allowed for a unique and open interaction, impossible to find in more formal institutional environments.

The seminar was for many an opportunity to network and exchange ideas. Across the room there were mixed feelings regarding whether or not the seminar would have allowed for constructive exchange, given the heterogeneity of the group and diversity of views.

"An opportunity to meet and confront ideas with those more experienced than me."

Some felt the group was skewed either towards or away from anti-establishment forces, either to the right or the left. The vast majority of participants, however, concluded at the end that this kind of seminar was an achievement, and that the exercise deserved to be pursued in future.

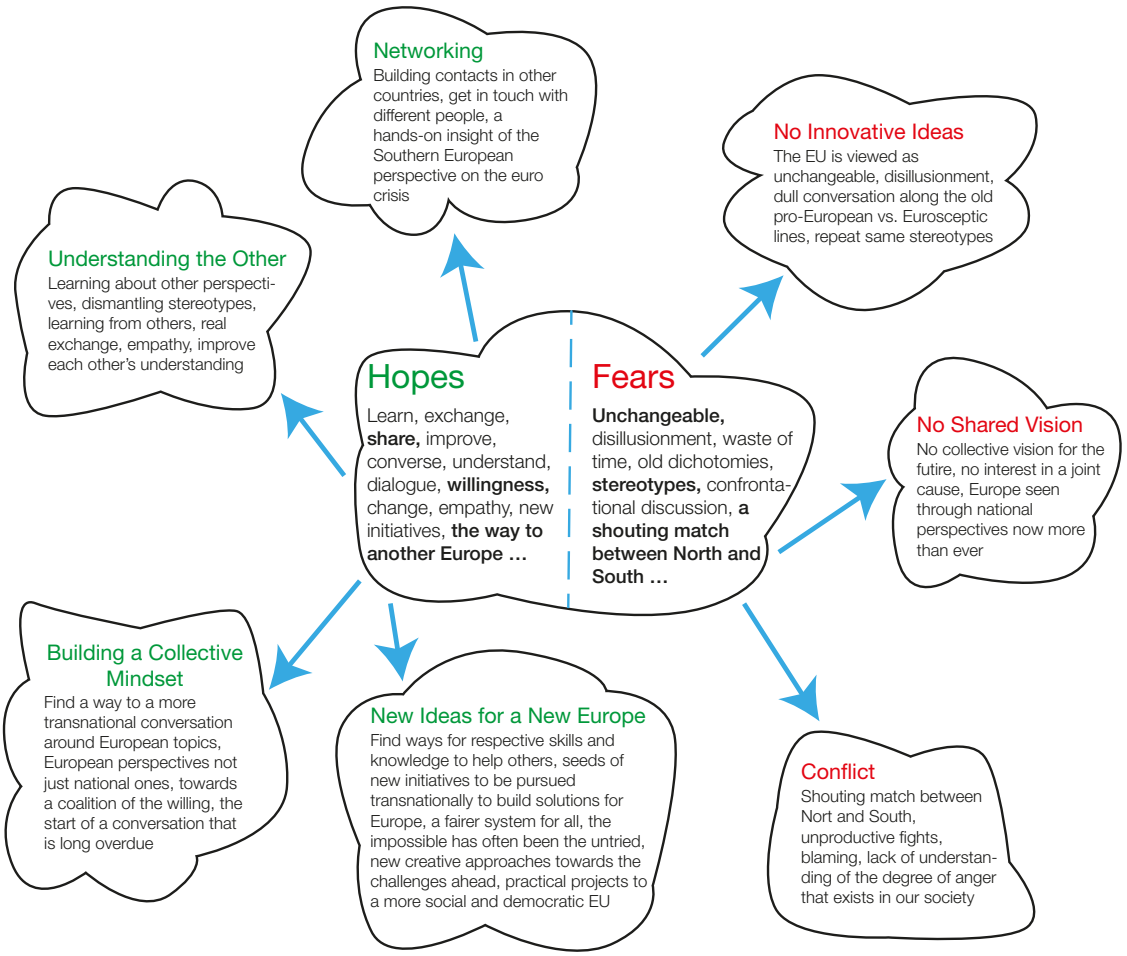
As representatives of both ends of the political spectrum got acquainted, the motivations for participation surfaced clearly: "I am here because I am open," said one seasoned politician. "I am here due to an absurd curiosity and willingness to learn," said another. "I hope to learn from others," echoed yet a third one.

A younger participant, in turn, said this was "an opportunity to meet and confront ideas with those more experienced than me."

The understanding of united Europe as one large missed opportunity was the driving force behind many participants' readiness to engage in the project: "Europe could have been the Silicon Valley and yet due to nation state borders it lacked the critical mass to turn into this."

As shared motivations began to emerge, so did some shared concerns. Either tacitly or overtly, several participants expressed concern regarding the effects of political instability in their countries, underlining how the present situation of uncertainty deeply affected political priorities, leaving European issues with little or no traction.

We asked participants to consider their hopes and fears with regards to the outcome of the seminar itself, using these as a common starting point to identify some priorities for the European integration project and for levers of action.



Shared Hopes and Fears

As we asked each participant to share their hopes and fears, encouraging patterns emerged and we gained insight as to how, across the political spectrum and transcending the North–South divide, participants shared the same basic hopes and fears regarding the possibility of shaping a better future for the EU.

In terms of hopes, these principally gravitated around the desire to discover innovative ideas for the construction of a better Europe, to achieve a collective mind frame through a greater understanding of the other, and to establish a solid network of individuals willing to make a change.

The fears expressed offered a mirror image of the participants' hopes. The greatest shared fear was that of realizing that no common vision for Europe was possible, and that the seminar would thus result in either conflict or in the rehashing of old and stale ideas and approaches.

Emerging themes and Common Concerns

The first day of our two-day endeavor was devoted to not only sharing hopes and fears but also experiences, views and analyses of the current situation. Participants were encouraged to identify shared aspirations for citizens across

Europe and new possibilities on how to deliver these aspirations. Various themes emerged and numerous open questions were posed.

"We need a change of paradigm. It has been done before."

Within the context of profound economic crisis, the need to address the current model of capitalism was unanimously recognized. Employment opportunities were identified as a priority, requiring both the creation of new sources of employment as well as the redefinition of the quality of jobs.

The need for more social dignity and equality was voiced loudly.

The overall relationship between the public and private sectors was questioned by a substantial number of participants, many calling for a radical rebalancing of this relationship.. "It has been done before," claimed one participant, summarizing adequately the attitude and determination voiced by many others.

All agreed that the current situation risked splitting Europe apart politically—not only economically. Hence the solution must be both of a political as well as an economic nature. Whilst agreeing that current political systems have lost legitimacy, whether the systems per se or its representatives are to blame, thus where precisely the problem and its solution lie was harder to ascertain.

"The right to good governance has been eroded and must be restored."

The transparency and accountability of individual politicians and government bodies were raised. Some suggested that the right to good governance, intended as "open and accountable governance," had been eroded and had to be restored via more participatory forms of democracy.

A disenfranchised European community was identified as part of the problem, alongside with the absence of equity in the process of Europeanization. The ensuing discussions underlined the continued relevance of other traditional cleavages and conundrums, notably, the issue of class politics and the eternal divide between political elites and their constituencies.

Stereotypes are a strong component of the European crisis. These stereotypes were understood by the participants as dangerous and potentially destructive for the European project. Representatives from Southern member states admitted the need for some element of conditionality in the relationship with fellow members and EU institutions, yet forcefully argued that such conditionality must be matched by an element of solidarity. Restoring collective thinking was deemed imperative. One participant underlined the risk of "not being able to heal the anger of the citizens of Southern states before it is too late." Without going as

"I am afraid we will not be able to heal the anger of the citizens of southern member states before it is too late."

far as invoking a European *demos,* the European integration project was deemed to have inadequately capitalized on European culture and shared history, failing to create a shared perception of the EU's collective values. The absence of this collective awareness constitutes a major obstacle in the creation of a European public sphere, the latter being considered a prerequisite to addressing the EU crisis of legitimacy.

What Next? Moving Towards Concrete Proposals and Initiatives

As groups started to naturally form around a number of themes of interest, participants were encouraged to move their thinking one-step further and jointly elaborate potential concrete initiatives.

Four topical clusters emerged grouping the range of proposals worked out earlier:

Social Economic Democracy

A new paradigm is needed for economic governance in our societies. The current economic crisis has violently hit the poorest and most vulnerable, highlighting the severe inequalities produced by market capitalism, to a degree to which the very foundations of the European economic and social model are being questioned. A new, more democratic, system of economic governance is called for. This process of economic democratization would entail a redefinition of the concept of European citizenship based on social guarantees at the European rather than the national level. One such social guarantee would be the European Unconditional Basic Income, that would be paid by the Union to every citizen on the lone condition of possessing European citizenship. The Union could collect the necessary funds through the establishment of fairer taxation. This would imply the introduction of a Tobin tax alongside a harsher fight against tax havens and tax evasion. Taxation would be progressive and harmonized across EU member states. This reform process would need to be accompanied by fostering citizen's active participation in companies and in the private sector more generally, embracing thus economic democracy intended as the strengthening of cooperatives, participatory budgets and other methods of co-determination. The European private sector would be protected against unfair competition, at the EU level this would mean enhancing entry barriers for those companies in breach of social and environmental rights, the latter to be embraced as core values of a new model of economic democracy.

"European unconditional basic income to be paid by the EU to all European citizens."

In light of the January 2014 deadline, participants of this group committed to supporting the EU citizens' initiative for Unconditional Basic Income (UBC) already underway, via the hosting of informative seminars and support for petition signing. The goal is to firmly place UBC in the agendas of political parties and social movements.

Citizen empowerment

Whilst the EU has to some extent always been perceived as distant and far-removed from the realities of its member states, the crisis has contributed enormously to discrediting the Union as a democratic, representative and legitimate source of political power. This perceived democratic deficit is the consequence of the lack of adequate spaces for transnational deliberation and debate, obstructing the exchange of information and experience and ultimately undermining the creation of any form of discernible European community.

"Build knowledge, re-educate citizens to citizenship."

Yet the problem is twofold, on the one hand, the lack of appropriate participatory platforms has inhibited the creation of a European political space, on the other, European citizens lack the necessary knowledge of EU politics and institutions that would allow them to participate effectively in said platforms. To address this problem the establishment of a transnational network of European Town Halls, both online and off-line was proposed. These town halls would focus on fostering a trans-European exchange of ideas and dialogue on issues of shared concern or interest for European citizens. They would not be strictly associated to the institutional activities of the European Union nor be sponsored by the latter. The aim would be that of engaging citizens, social groups and local communities, yet deviating from pre-existing initiatives promoting, and promoted by, the EU by establishing themselves as a non-institutional apolitical space. It would require the

"Provide not only more but better information."

launch of a large-scale provocative transnational media campaign aimed at spurring interest around European themes and kick-starting the European town halls initiative by identifying the town halls as the appropriate arena where European citizens can gather in an informal and communicative setting. To achieve the exchange of not only more but better information, the Town Halls initiative would need to be complemented by a top-down approach addressing the lack of significant knowledge of EU and European shared political and cultural history. This aspect could be addressed by EU institutions directly through the promotion of a trans-European common education agenda that would include compulsory political thought and citizenship classes to be incorporated in the national syllabuses of secondary education throughout Europe. The creation of a European right to a basic education in political sciences and citizenship could be pondered.

Participants in this group agreed on the need for a further workshop around the topic of European citizen empowerment to establish what next steps can be taken.

The "Building Bridges" Initiative

Stereotypes and lack of a serious understanding of the other not only hamper the creation of an empathic European community but also affect the relationship between policy makers. During a discussion on the topic of youth unemployment, an example of the extent to which the crisis is having divergent impacts across Europe emerged.

Whilst in Germany, youth unemployment is triggered by under-qualification, the opposite is true for the Southern states. Participants belonging to both realities were genuinely surprised in finding themselves so dramatically unaware of the existence of such diametrically opposed situations affecting their countries. Strengthening the interaction of national policy makers and politicians across Europe would allow for the creation of a shared perception of the problems faced by fellow member states and moderate what are now perceived as seemingly insurmountable policy divisions.

"Participants were dramatically unaware of the existence of such diametrically opposed situations affecting their countries."

To do so, a number of initiatives can be implemented, from an Erasmus of sorts between elected officials across countries aimed at experiencing first-hand the political context of a different country, to bilateral North-South initiatives to foster mutual understanding, for instance, joint public letters, petitions, visits, not

necessarily to agree but in order to listen and acquire a greater understanding of the other's positions.

Participants in this group committed to promoting jointly or individually the following initiatives which aim at making the path to banking and fiscal union more transparent:

- On October 15th, when national budgets are sent to the Commission in the framework of the "European Semester," think tanks convene a public conference. Parliamentary Rapporteurs, ministers, and delegations from a sub-set of member states are to present their national debate and decision on the budget. The same can be done before decisions at the EU level are taken.
- Video conferences with MPs/activists from different countries could be organized, as well as making full use of formal and informal parliamentary fora, via joint parliamentary meetings.
- After European Council meetings, Ministers parliaments could invite ministers from another member state for a debriefing of the Council meeting. The promotion of these interactions should be promoted as a priority for the upcoming Italian presidency.
- The promotion of membership of MEPs in national parliamentary committees in those member states where this is not already the case.

The Alter-European Platform

The wave of Eurosceptic-leaning parties across Europe is a clear warning sign, particularly so in view of the upcoming European Parliament elections. If left unaddressed, this trend will conceivably see these parties gravitating towards the Eurosceptic bloc represented by groups such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP). In all likelihood, the EU would then have to prepare to face a parliamentary reality where a substantial share of elected representatives holds anti-European views, with severe consequences for the parliament's activities. Having recognized that many emerging anti-establishment groups are indeed more Eurocritical rather than Eurosceptic, it is necessary and urgent to disconnect the idea of the European Project from the current institutional framework, and provide room for those who are pro-European, yet critical of current EU policies and institutions, to participate and act at the EU level and construct a European alternative. The initiative would promote more participation, accountability and exchange of best practices as well as more direct contact between MPs and citizens, offering a platform for public campaigning around a number of flagship policy initiatives such as a European social entrepreneurship fund, basic income etc. The aim of an Alter-European Platform would thus be that of developing a shared vision for an alternative or other Europe based on shared denominators. This requires engaging in a pan-European debate to develop a platform for collective action, and policy and institutional alternatives. The platform would have both an online and an offline organization, the latter entailing a biannual Alter-Europe-Forum as well as local community chapters. Concretely this platform could aim to promote a manifesto for Europe's political and social future rallying around the EP14, creating a network of political activists for the both the elections and beyond.

"Provide room for those who are pro-European, yet critical of current EU policies and institutions, to construct a European alternative."

Participants in this group agreed on the need for a further workshop on the topic of an Alter-Europe Platform to establish what next steps to be taken. This workshop will take place on the 18th December 2013 in Barcelona.

Conclusions

Looking back at two days of intense and open debate, a few general conclusions come to mind, which take on notions and concerns debated in all of the four topical clusters.

- First, the split of perceptions between North and South actually exists and has already sunk in, so to say. However, it proved not strong enough to over-rule an interactive format offering a dialogue on shared goals and ideas for policy responses. Behind the split lies a deeply rooted desire among Europeans to find common ground.
- Second, the policy makers and political actors engaged in this process perceive a strong need to reconnect with the people and to re-engage the people through dialogue. The claim for more comprehensive exchange among Europeans was implicit in just about every single idea voiced at the Berlin seminar.
- Third, a strong demand for citizen participation was heard throughout the debates. Most saw the engagement of citizens as the way to overcome the disconnect between decision makers and publics.
- Finally, the layout and structure of the seminar clearly helped to focus the ideas of participants on responses that they would and could engage in themselves. Very few of the proposals presented could be read as calling on

others to act—participants predominantly focused on propositions which would involve them as actors just as much as others.

Clearly, a European public space in the true sense of the word does not exist yet. However, the crisis has probably helped its inception more than many appeals, campaigns, or treaties. Still, the debate is not integrated enough; there is much more talk about the problems of others than debate among Europeans about what goals they can share and jointly pursue.

When such debates take place, the potential of Europe becomes tangible. The thrust of such debates is about building Europe, adapting, changing or deepening it, and not about unravelling and deconstructing the integration project. In spite of their differences in perception and position, Europeans seem to understand that they are all in the same predicament and that solutions are best found by opting in rather than out of the EU.

The organizing partners see this format as an entry point to transnational contact and dialogue of today's and tomorrow's political generations. We aim to convene individuals or elements of this group again—sometimes on specific themes or opportunities. Building on the interest that participants have expressed in each other, a much wider and stronger debate among Europeans is feasible. It has enormous constructive potential, and speaking with each other definitely reinforces the sense of belonging—rather than the feeling that we are driven apart.

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