

## PANELISTS DEBATE

### **Ali ASLAN**

Thank you, gentlemen. I think I speak for all here in the audience, I for one am overwhelmed by the energy and passion that you have put on here this morning. Clearly you are concerned about the state of Europe and you want the state of the Union to succeed. I think that has become very obvious. We have 25 minutes left in this particular session and Michael, are you giving me the cue that you have to depart?

### **Michael LOTHIAN**

I have to catch an airplane.

### **Ali ASLAN**

You have to catch an airplane. So, ladies and gentlemen, it is really the airplane, it is not symbolic that the UK member is leaving the panel, that is not what it is.

### **Michael LOTHIAN**

Thank you very much. Very nice to meet you.

### **Ali ASLAN**

Thank you, Michael. We won't overestimate and read into the symbolism of this particular act but we wish you a safe flight back. If you will, you can push up the seat that way, it will probably look better on the pictures.

Ladies and gentlemen, now, I am fairly certain that in the midst of these very interesting and passionate presentations, we will have an accumulation of comments, remarks and questions. If that is the case, please indicate so that we can do a very quick Q&A session in the remaining time. If there are questions, please let me know by indicating and I will incorporate you. If that is not the case at this particular point, I have a couple of questions of my own. Minister Borrell, the issue of migration, obviously and it has become very clear throughout the presentations here on this panel, has led to a rise of populism and populist parties throughout EU national parliaments. So, Spain on the other hand, despite having gone through some economic hardships itself, has been spared of this particular phenomenon. There is no significant populist movement to speak of. Why do you think the Spanish case is so different?

### **Josep BORRELL**

I wouldn't say that we don't have populist movements in Spain. We do have some. We do not have xenophobic or anti-migrant reactions. Some kinds of populism are not like that. That's a good question. Why Spain?

First of all, Spain did not receive the same number of migrants as Italy. The Italians felt abandoned by the European Union. They asked for assistance and we, the Spanish and the French, looked the other way. In Spain, we did not have the high concentration that Italy, or Germany, had two summers ago. Now, it's starting. We have had almost 40,000 arrivals this year. However, it is true that, at the bottom of Spanish society, a feeling of solidarity is shown every day by people welcoming migrants to the South, in Andalusia. Maybe because we were originally a migrant people; maybe because we need a large workforce; maybe because our migration was mainly Latin American. It is much easier to integrate someone who speaks your language and shares a cultural or religious tradition. It is much easier to integrate people from South America than people from the Horn of Africa. I think that played a part.

Let's cross our fingers: in Spain we do not have this kind of reaction against migrants, against foreigners, this idea that is developing in Eastern Europe with people saying, "We want to be a pure society. We refuse migration. We

want to live enclosed". There really is that kind of thinking: "We don't want migrants". We have seen what a failure the attempts to assign mandatory quotas in Eastern Europe have been. They didn't work. Normally, this should not work because it violates a society's deepest desires. That's the most important reason, in my view. I hope that we will continue to be a country that welcomes others, and that we will continue to have, with our neighbours in North Africa and Morocco, a cooperation policy that helps us out a great deal.

**Ali ASLAN**

Cooperation when it comes to migration is obviously very important. Karin Kneissl, your government as junior partner has been making statements that could be defined as xenophobic and anti-refugees on migrant issues. The criticism that your government, particularly your junior partner, has received in the international sphere is widely known. Would you say, when we talk about the future of Europe and Austria in particular, that there is no danger of Austria drifting to the right on this particular front? Do you think that the concerns your government has been voicing vis-à-vis immigrants and migrants are very much in place?

**Karin KNEISSL**

Could you be a bit more specific about your criticism? I do not understand your question.

**Ali ASLAN**

I am referring to the xenophobic sentiments from your junior partner at this point.

**Karin KNEISSL**

Can you give an example? I am not aware of a particular example.

**Ali ASLAN**

There are proposals, for instance, to have people of Jewish faith register. Is that fake news?

**Karin KNEISSL**

I am not saying this is fake news, but you are taking out of context something that was decided under a previous government in a specific province when it comes to ordering a certain type of food. This was decided in a province by a previous government, and we are not speaking about the national government but a regional one.

**Ali ASLAN**

Let us then talk about the specific goals of the Austrian EU Presidency. Let us talk about what Austria is in the midst of contributing to a sound, safe and prosperous EU. How about that?

**Karin KNEISSL**

We are now in the third or fourth month of the EU Presidency, and as Minister of Foreign Affairs I have spoken about it briefly, the vacuum we have in southeast Europe. We feel close; geography is the constant factor of history, as we know. We have a large diaspora of people of Serbian, Kosovan and Albanian origin, and we have an absence of perspective, particularly for the young population there. My first visits were to Sarajevo, Belgrade and Zagreb, because it is a region whose importance we know about, being surrounded by EU countries and not having the clear-cut perspective with regard to a European future. I fully understand the scepticism, and Mr. Bourlanges also referred to the European elections in Paris and The Hague.

**Jean-Louis BOURLANGES**

The big difference - and this will be my concluding thought - between the French and the Germans on Europe is that: in France, you will not find anyone who agrees with the European status quo. You will have either people against it,

who want to go back in time, or people who want to go further. In Germany, they are very happy with Europe as it is and they say: "If it doesn't work any better than it is, it's because people don't respect the treaties as they are". This makes for a significantly different starting point and explains a bit of the setback you attribute to President Macron. He came up with an idea: "France has been dragging its feet. Germany has always wanted to move forward. Therefore, all it will take for Europe to move forward is France getting in motion". Well, no, France was dragging its feet, but Germany has, since Maastricht, since reunification, been satisfied with Europe as it is, and is not prepared to enable Europe to make that qualitative leap forward. It remains that Europe is threatened and the status quo is not an option.

#### **Ali ASLAN**

Nicolas, you are based both in Europe and in the US, so you have a double perspective on issues, if you will. The current US President has made no secret of the fact that issues and relations with Europe are not his number one priority. Is the relevance of the EU diminishing from where you stand? When you are in DC and speaking to your American counterparts, do you get the impression that Europe is losing in terms of influence and relevance in that part of the world?

#### **Nicolas VÉRON**

There are different cycles on different issues here. Regarding the fact that the EU is not central to how the US looks at the world, this has been a long-standing trend. When Obama's term was nicknamed the Pacific Presidency, he did not have a background in Europe and was not too interested in it, so there is nothing new here. Clearly, the US's major security issues are in the Middle East and China. Europe has been seen as low-priority simply because it was not a hotspot of problems.

The question that is still unresolved, like so many questions about the Trump presidency, is whether this administration will be aggressively hostile to Europe. President Trump said that the EU was set up to take advantage of the US and to put it in a difficult position – that is unprecedented and something that no previous president has said. Therefore, I would not frame it in terms of relevance or irrelevance but in terms of whether the US will be aggressive in terms of EU integration or whether it will just go away.

We do not know yet. Europe is actually more relevant in a way, because it is more of a counterweight to some impulses of the Trump administration, certainly in trade or climate change. It is less aligned with the American administration than it was previously, and certainly under the Obama administration, so that creates conflict and conflict creates relevance, but it is basically too early to tell.

#### **Ali ASLAN**

Minister Kneissl, when we talk about Europe – and this panel has been no exception – the need for solidarity is always being stressed. Looking at the future, talking to your European counterparts such as Minister Borrell, how optimistic are you about the state of the EU, its role going forward and its relevance in world affairs?

#### **Karin KNEISSL**

What I have always been proud of as a European citizen is that it is built on treaties, and just a few days ago, October 24th, we had the 374<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia, which in my assessment was the beginning of modernity in Europe. It was the beginning of the territorial state, of the equality of sovereigns and also of international law, and also of multilateralism. Grotius et Richelieu, un idéaliste et un réaliste, the two of them had been drafting the Treaty of Westphalia. That for me is what Europe is about, credibility, and in order to remain credible, particularly with regard to China, it is all about whether we are complying with our own normative obligations. One of the major issues in foreign affairs is the Iran nuclear disarmament treaty, and a phrase a lot of us in international relations are familiar with is "*pacta sunt servanda*", treaties have to be preserved. It is all about the trust we have in signatures, in the end, and this is what Europe has always stood for. Therefore, in order to remain credible and to be considered a player, we have to fulfil our own obligations on a normative level. Solidarity is a nice catch-word, but you have to enshrine it in norms, and I would like to see Europe moving out of this mentality of bean-counting and going more into understanding the bigger geopolitical challenges. This is missing at many levels, and it requires humanistic



education, backbone and a certain degree of courage and self-confidence. That is how I understand my work in my current position as EU chair – from time to time it is necessary to call a spade a spade.

**Ali ASLAN**

It is about a desire for a more courageous and self-confident Europe going forward. Minister Borrell, I want to give you the opportunity to wrap up with the very same question. Looking forward to the future of the EU, which your country has been part of for many decades, as someone who travels all over the world and talks to people, what is the international assessment of Europe? Do we still have the means and influence to be a relevant player in world affairs?

**Josep BORRELL**

Before the euro crisis, when I was travelling in South America, people asked me how they should repeat the success story of our integration process. It was before the crisis, the economy was booming, we were absorbing a lot of migrants and people were looking at us as an example to be followed. Then the crisis came and many European countries lost 10 years, and today we do not have the weight of other big powers that are emerging. The future of Europe will be through bigger and stronger integration, but not all the European states are ready to do so, and many are not willing, not just the UK which is leaving, but other countries do not want a better integration. Germany is in an optimal situation. Why should Germany change?

However, if you want to have a role in the world and to influence it, then Germany alone is too small – we have to integrate further, but knowing realistically that there is no will for doing that in many European countries, the keywords for me are differentiated integration around the euro zone and the Schengen zone.

**Ali ASLAN**

Do you mean a two-track Europe?

**Josep BORRELL**

We are already in a two-track Europe. Some member states share a currency, others do not. Some have abolished their borders and others want to close them. Two of the most important characteristics of a state, the currency and the border, are being shared by some of us whereas others refuse to share them, so differentiated integration is there. It is nothing new.

**Ali ASLAN**

I am trying to end on a hopeful and optimistic note here, but I understand and appreciate your honesty about the concerns you have vis-à-vis Europe, particularly that some member states are not ready or willing to move this union along. Regarding some basic European strategic issues, this is a topic we could have continued for the next two or three hours and one that will be with us for a very long time. That much has become clear through the passionate and eloquent statements here.

Europe will have a place and a role to play in European affairs, whether it wants to or not; the question is in what scope, size and capacity.