

The Growing Scepticism about the European Union Future From Unity to a Potential Separation

الشكوك المتزايدة حول مستقبل الاتحاد الأوروبي من الوحدة إلى انفصال محتمل

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Abstract

The present paper aims at discussing the different economic and political situations that the European continent is facing. After a long period of correlation between its twenty-eight members, Europe has found itself threatened to be divided again. This potential separation is due to many factors that contributed, in a negative way, in the emergence of several political conflicts. In the light of the domestic and international challenges, the European leaders have to think deeply about how to solve all the internal and external issues in order to keep a perpetual union between its states, especially with Russia, Turkey and the United States of America. The issue of integration and the question of refugees with Turkey, the future reforms of Trump at the level of the NATO, and the conflict with Russia over the Ukraine seem to be the main challenges that Europe is facing at the present time. These aforementioned challenges will certainly have a negative impact on its internal stability represented by the European Union, which seems to be fragile and may lead to collapse at any time.

Keywords : *European Union, Integration, Correlation, Separation, Scepticism.*

ملخص

تحاول هذه الورقة مناقشة مختلف الأوضاع الاقتصادية والسياسية التي تواجهها القارة الأوروبية. بعد فترة طويلة من الترابط بين الدول الأعضاء الثمانية والعشرين، وجدت أوروبا نفسها مهددة بالانقسام مرة أخرى. ويرجع هذا الانفصال المحتمل إلى عوامل كثيرة أسهمت، بطريقة سلبية، في ظهور العديد من الصراعات السياسية. وفي ضوء التحديات المحلية والدولية، يتعين على القادة الأوروبيين التفكير بعمق في كيفية حل جميع القضايا الداخلية والخارجية من أجل الحفاظ على اتحاد دائم بين دولها، وخاصة مع روسيا وتركيا والولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. ويبدو أن قضية التكامل ومسألة اللاجئين مع تركيا، والإصلاحات المستقبلية للرئيس ترامب على مستوى الناتو، والصراع مع روسيا حول أوكرانيا هي التحديات الرئيسية التي تواجهها أوروبا في الوقت الحاضر. ومن المؤكد أن هذه التحديات سائلة الذكر سيكون لها أثر سلبي على استقرارها الداخلي والذي يمثلته الاتحاد الأوروبي الذي يبدو هشاً و معرضاً إلى الانهيار في أي وقت.

الكلمات الدالة: الاتحاد الأوروبي، التكامل، الترابط، الفصل، الشكوك.

1-Introduction

After the Second World War, Europe was in urgent need to unite its citizens in one rank against any future serious problems they might encounter. This union necessity compelled them to organize several meetings in order to achieve their aim. Union was not easy to be made, but the circumstances of that post-war time contributed efficiently in the European compromise over Union in 1957. One could notice that the European leaders were somehow hasty in making such union at the time because many political and economic issues remained ambiguous. This ambiguity drove them, in a way or another, to a false direction in which many conflicts started to emerge within the European domicile. Such conflicts, in the recent decade, have led to the emergence of some political factions, inside Europe, which have called for separation after decades of correlation. Two important questions can be asked about this issue: Why do Europeans feel uncertain about the future of their union? What are the main factors that may lead the European Union to a possible collapse?

So, this process of scepticism started to spread all over the continent. Nowadays, Europeans have indeed a doubt over the future of their unity. For them, Union seems to be threatened because of the misunderstanding between the member states about how to deal with some issues inside and outside the European doors. So, this disagreement is undoubtedly leading them to destroy their union, and make themselves weak in front of the national and international challenges. Besides, some factors can also be the source of any potential decline such as the serious disagreement over many political and economic issues with Russia, Turkey and the Trump administration.

2-Foundation of the European Union

Europe suffered a lot from both the First and Second World Wars. These two periods witnessed the destruction of the continent. The latter became heavily exhausted and weak in front of its enemies or any potential threat it might face. The United States of America seized the opportunity to lead the world. Its economic and military power compelled the Europeans to ask for her help. Later, the European leaders

started thinking about uniting their ranks through the establishment of a new body called the United States of Europe like the one of USA. They succeeded then to convince each other about the importance of such union. They finally established what is known as the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. Later, and exactly in 1957, six countries took the initiative to build the European Union after they had engaged into difficult debates and negotiations in Rome. Not all countries advocated such idea of union, but there were others, which remained outside like Britain. The British membership then faced a serious objection on the part of the French President De Gaulle. This opposition did not last for a long time, and soon the European community witnessed an extension of twenty-eight states as members including Britain. With regard to the group of European countries, which is considered as the founding states of the European Union, consisted of Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg and Italy.

So, union between the European countries was urgently needed because they found themselves powerless and very weak. Their aim behind the establishment of such community was to make peace, security and stability. They also intended to rebuild their economies which were somehow completely destroyed. Britain, France, Germany and some Western Europe countries were the most countries that found themselves as victims at the end of the war because of their military actions which caused more than sixty millions of deaths; most of them were from Europe. It was because of this that the European leaders were determined to reconstruct the continent and protect it from any future potential war. They succeeded then to build a strong community which witnessed later a membership extension from six to twenty eight states. They started to work together and discuss all issues related to all domains of life. Unfortunately, this process of unity did not continue as it had been expected, and soon the member states faced many conflicts and internal divisions over many political and economic issues. With regard to the foreign policy, they did not have one voice and one decision towards some external challenges. So, one could say that the European Union is expected to decline because of many factors that will be discussed

in the following points.

3-Factors Leading to the Breakdown

The potential decline that is expected to happen in the European community is based on a whole host of reasons. The bad economic system can be at the top of the list of factors that may contribute in a negative way to the European Union decline. The economic crisis in some countries like Spain, Portugal and Greece, the British exit and the conflicts between the European leaders and some countries such as Turkey and Russia will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

3.1- Economic Crisis in Spain, Portugal and Greece

Since the end of 2009, the European Continent has faced difficult economic circumstances represented by the debt crisis that is taking place in many European countries like Spain, Portugal, Greece, Ireland and Italy. These members of the European Union surprisingly found themselves in a situation in which they became incapable to pay back their debts or to provide funding for their heavily indebted banks. They haven't succeeded to create sufficient economic growth inside their countries. Consequently, this situation urgently required the intervention of the European Central Bank or the International Monetary Fund in order to get rid of such crisis. Seven years ago, after Europeans had seen that the situation seemed to be getting worse, the European countries started thinking about taking significant financial measures that might remedy the economic defects. The weak European economy emerged as a result of the slow economic growth in the world after the financial crisis in the United States of America in 2008. This recession showed clearly that the European monetary policy was not well planned and could not be maintained for a long time. It has indeed become a fragile European economy. Greece was the first country that failed in taking fiscal reforms. This led her to face a budget deficit as a result of the low tax revenues. Its economic situation urged an immediate financial assistance of the European Central Bank. The foreign and domestic investments within the indebted country Greece seemed to be reluctant as

the investors became afraid of the different potential risks they might face in the future. In this case, the investors were obliged to demand higher incomes when investing in the securities of the country in order to compensate what might be lost. In both cases, Greece has failed to reach an economic growth. In other words, the country can't develop its economy without a real investment in different domains of life. On the other side, the investors refused to put their money at risk, the reason why they set conditions and asked for higher yields which the country could not afford. So, the fact of stipulating certain conditions was also considered as another problem that might put the indebted country under a real economic pressure. Such reticence of the investors was a result of the lack of confidence between both sides which could easily touch the neighbouring countries especially the heavily indebted ones such as Ireland, Portugal and Italy. In order to save the countries from collapse, the European Union has intervened in order to find suitable ways to deal with the current situation. In 2010, the International Monetary Fund gave more than 100 billion Euros to Greece since it was the most affected by the economic crisis. One year later, it was given another sum of money that exceeded 150 billion dollars. This financial assistance did not target Greece only, but it also touched other countries like Ireland and Portugal. Europeans decided then to found a new monetary institution called the European Financial Stability Facility in order to lend money for any country in urgent need of financial assistance. This special organization was established as a provisional mechanism by the European States in June 2010. It intended to supply the European banks with liquidity. In December 2011 and February 2012, and as a new financial plan called Long Term Refinancing Operation, the European Central Bank gave more than 400 billion dollars to the indebted countries. One could say that the European Union has become economically exhausted because of the outlay cost in different domains of life.

With regard to the political side, the authorities of the indebted countries were obliged to resort to austerity. In other words, they intended to minimize the gap between the revenue and the expenditure. Such action

was viewed as an economic solution, but it created another socio- political problem; Spanish and Greek citizens started protesting in the streets asking their governments to withdraw the austerity legislation. Portugal and Italy, in turn, witnessed political rebellions against the parties in power. Political tensions started to take place between the leading European countries, such as Germany on one side and the indebted ones on the other side. The latter, including Greece, were asked to make urgent reforms on their budgets if they wanted to be helped by Germany. They were called to minimize expenditure and impose taxation. This economic procedure seemed to be bad for the internal stability as the public protests started to occur everywhere. Finally, one could say that the economic problems as well as the public pressure may push many indebted countries to think about leaving the Euro zone in order to put an end to the indoor troubles that are considered as a real threat for the internal stability. Such countries felt they had lost their independence, and that remaining under the rule of some leading countries would not benefit their people. For some European political factions, the exit from European Union seems to be a good solution. For them, Britain is the best example.

3.2-Brexit

The British withdrawal from the European Union is considered as the first step towards the European collapse. According to historians, Britain has never been really integrated in the European Union. She refused to enter into Schengen area, and to have a common Euro currency. The British hesitancy in the European membership has been noticed from the beginning of the foundation of the union. After the Second World War, Europe found itself exhausted and very weak economically and politically. Such situation urged its countries to rebuild Europe again and revive diplomatic negotiations over their domestic and foreign issues. The initiative of reconstructing a strong united Europe had been taken by the former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who wanted to reach a real union as the one that had been realized in the United States of America in spite of all the conflicts between the political factions. The year 1957 witnessed the birth of the European Union,

which consisted of six countries Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg as a result of the Rome treaty. The outset of the process witnessed the British hesitancy in the European Union membership. After she had been convinced, she accepted the idea, but she faced the French objection represented by President De Gaulle. Later and after a long debate, she succeeded to join such association for making peace, security and stability in the whole continent.

Nowadays, the European countries are facing many problems in all domains of life. These problems have led in a way or another to the emergence of conflicts between them. At the social level, unemployment is still threatening millions of Europeans. So, despite the fact that the European countries had attempted to make some reforms in order to minimize the negative impact of unemployment, more than five million citizens were later deprived of their jobs especially between 2007 and 2012. At the economic level, the majority of European countries have found themselves no more in a better situation as they were before. They have not felt at ease economically, politically and socially. For instance, Spain and Italy are on the way of falling down because of recession; France and Germany are also in a bad economic situation because of their heavy responsibility towards the debt crisis of some neighbouring countries. Greece has really collapsed in a sudden uncontrollable economic decline that may urge her in a way or another to leave the European Union.

Britain, which is considered as an important country and the most powerful member in the European community, did not feel at ease when she saw the European members falling one after the other. She concluded then that the European security would be exposed to risk. Such feeling led some British officials and politicians to think about leaving the European Union. Britain then, under the leadership of the Prime Minister David Cameron, became under a public pressure asking for a referendum over the subject of leaving or remaining in the union. The British citizens felt that their membership was not beneficial in terms of the high cost, the failed austerity measures, and the high percentage of migration towards Britain.

Cameron accepted the idea, and the British people finally decided to withdraw themselves from this weak European organization in 2016. Such final decision resulted in the resignation of David Cameron. Britain, under the administration of the Prime Minister Theresa May, is still negotiating some remaining issues over the suitable procedures that will be taken in leaving completely the European Union in terms of politics and economy, but she geographically remains in the same frame. Britain is threatened to be divided from within. In other words, she has become afraid of her internal stability, especially after the decision of Scotland to quit the United Kingdom. Finally, one could say that the British withdrawal from union is also another factor that will undoubtedly lead in a way or another to the European Union collapse.

3.3- European Turkish Conflict

No one can deny the fact that Turkey is also a powerful country in the world. It is considered as the second military power in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). But in spite of its strong power economically and militarily, it has still been waiting for a complete integration into the European Union. Two years after the foundation of the aforementioned organization and exactly in 1959, Turkey intended for a membership in the European Economic Community. The Turkish economy, at that time, was not as it is today. It was less developed if compared to the founding countries of the European Union. It was because of this that the Turkish economic integration into the community took a long time. Later, the European countries started to deal gradually with Turkey by getting rid of any kind of taxation on the majority of imported Turkish products. The European Economic Community had the intention to establish a good commercial relationship with Turkey but it wanted this trade to be based on the principle of liberalization. In other words, Turkey was called to remove or loosen any kind of restriction on the economic system, and she has done the best to execute all the European demands. The Turkish accession into the European Community was possible in a given period of time when the relation was warm in spite of the political insecurity that characterized the country,

but it has become far from reach nowadays.

The bad relationship between Turkey and the European countries undoubtedly has a negative impact on the future of the European Union in general and on the Turkish accession in particular. This means that Europe will find itself weak without Turkey, and Turkey, in turn, will not be integrated without meeting the European conditions. So, the today's relation does not encourage both sides in establishing a cooperative relation and a strong Europe against American and Russian threats. Many problems and events have recently emerged and have become the source of the European hesitancy towards the Turkish integration. Europeans have felt that the Turkish officials are reticent to meet some conditions. Trade liberalization has become the main obstacle in front of the progress of negotiations between the two sides, but in spite of this trade conflict, Turkey has somehow been integrated completely into the European economy without being an official member. As it has already been mentioned, the European reticence towards the Turkish membership is due to many events. For instance, during the eighties of the twentieth century, there was a conflict between Greece and Turkey; this bad relation impeded, in a way or another, the advancement of the Turkish accession into EU. This unpleasant relationship did not last for a long time, and Greece soon attempted to normalize it. It was indeed an opportunity for Turkey to convince the remaining countries to start negotiations over the issue of accession. Unfortunately, things became more complicated after another event had taken place. It was in fact the political conflict with Cyprus, which had undoubtedly a negative influence on the relation with Europe. All these events have not prevented both sides from continuing the discussions over the subject of integration.

Today, Erdogan, the Turkish President, is more interested in being an EU member than the previous Turkish officials were. On the other side, European leaders are also ready to accept Turkey as an important country in the continent. They also know that the Turkish membership will give strength to Europe politically and militarily, since it is considered

as the second power in the NATO after the United States of America. Europeans then are still hesitating towards Turkey. According to politicians, behind such hesitancy, there are some European political factions which are making all their attempts to make negotiations fail. They are doing this under the pretext of Islam phobia. Europeans should know first that the crimes that are committed everywhere by Islamic groups do not represent Islam as a religion and Turkey as a Muslim country. Second, they should recognize that Turkey is geographically a part of Europe and they are obliged to get in touch with. Third, Turkey is a powerful country and it has become very strong after the recent failed coup attempt against Erdogan. The failure of the military coup, that took place on July 15th, 2016, will undoubtedly lead the country to a more internal stability. The latter seems to be very important for both Turkey and the European countries as well. One could say that despite the fact that there are some obstacles in front of accession such as the problem of refugees, both European leaders and Turkey can achieve a great compromise within the frame of the European Union. According to politicians, the continuous European hesitancy towards the Turkish integration is not beneficial for both sides. It is so in the sense that they share the common interests politically and economically in many parts of the world such as Africa and the Middle East. This means that freezing and stopping negotiations over integration and excluding Turkey from the European family will undoubtedly lead to weakness and the European Union collapse in the future.

3.4-European American Relation under Trump Administration

No one can deny the fact that the Second World War was the second bloody and destructive conflict between few countries at that time. After the war, Europe found itself heavily exhausted because of the economic casualties. The economic and military situation after the war was a good opportunity for USA to lead the world. Europe became very weak and could not defend itself in case of potential future threats. It was obliged to think about a powerful ally that would protect it. USA appeared to be the best

country to rely on because of its power. Such idea in mind compelled the European leading countries to think about establishing what is known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 during the era of the US President Truman who was the thirty third president of the United States of America. His era witnessed many events like the Marshall Plan in order to construct again the economy of the western part of Europe, the Cold War which emerged as a reaction to the Soviet and Chinese communism, and the third event was the foundation of the aforementioned organization NATO. The purpose of establishment of such body was to protect its members against the pro-communist countries. But in spite of this cooperation, the relationship between the United States and Europe has witnessed conflicts in different domains, especially the military and economy. The relation was somehow warm during the previous US administrations of both George Bush and Obama, but it has become bad at the beginning of President Trump's era.

According to politicians, the different declarations of Trump over the subject of NATO have chocked the European leaders. During his electoral campaign, President Trump declared that his country would withdraw itself from this military body. This means that he threatened Europe indirectly that its security would not be guaranteed against potential foreign threats if she did not pay more for the participation of its army in the protection of the western European region. The potential future US withdrawal will undoubtedly have a negative impact on both sides. For Europe, it will put the continent in danger after losing a world leading power; the western part of the continent is the most exposed part to risk. In other words, the Eastern Europe represented by Russia is considered as the real danger to the other side of the continent, especially the political and military conflict that is taking place in Ukraine. Such conflict obliges Europe to rely on USA because it cannot face Russia alone. This European dependence on a powerful ally shows clearly its weakness. So, it is for this reason that Trump is threatening Europe in order to gain more benefits after making reforms at the level of the North-Atlantic Treaty. With regard to USA, its withdrawal from NATO won't be good for her too.

She is considered as the first power in this military organization, and its support to her allies all over the world has given her the possibility to impose its plans and its views on any action that may take place in any part of the world.

Basing on this idea, one could say that if USA withdraws itself from cooperating with Europe, it will certainly have a negative impact on its international role, and she will undoubtedly lose its influence on its allies, especially those in the Middle East. Europe, in turn, may seek for another ally other than the American one, and this substitution will surely put USA in a weak position in front of the Russian threat, and consequently she will lose its world leadership. So, the American partnership is significant for the European Union and for USA itself. The latter cannot face perils without Europe, and the European Union, in turn, cannot keep its strength without having a solid relationship with USA. So, Union between Europeans depends on their relation with USA. This means that the European leaders will be obliged to satisfy the needs of President Trump by making some reforms over their economic and military contributions in the NATO. They will be forced to do so in order to be well protected and to keep themselves really united since the European Union is at stake.

3.5-Relation with Russia

When talking about the relation between the Western Europe and the eastern part, we mainly refer on the issue of Ukraine. The latter seems to be the battlefield of a new Cold War between the West supported by the United States of America and the East under the leadership of Russia. The conflict between both sides started after the Ukrainians had showed their intention to join the European Union, and began to organize marches as a clear message to the Russian side that they were really interested and eager in being integrated into such community. This decision did not please Russia and angered her. She did not feel at ease towards such EU extension of territory towards the East. The support and sympathy of the West for Ukraine against the Russian intervention has been the main source of the conflict between both sides.

This situation compelled Russia, in a way or another, to support a rebellious faction inside Ukraine. The European leaders, in turn, decided to stand by the side of the authorities there in order to put an end to the Russian dominance over the region. Consequently, the relation between them has become very bad, and Europe has lost an ally which has soon become an enemy because of the Ukraine crisis. The European countries have not found an appropriate way to be used in order to fight against Russia. So, this fact of not having a common view towards the Russian threat put the European community in a weak position. In other words, the member states are facing a critical political situation represented by the conflicts and the disagreements between members over many issues related to the internal policy, let alone the foreign side.

Such European weakness made the political decisions ineffective. Russia, in turn, may benefit from such fragility, and makes a pressure on European leaders to make concession over many subjects during the different negotiations. Europeans don't have the same interests and the same political relations with Russia. The European Russian relations differ from one country to another. So, the fact of having one voice and a common decision against Russia seems to be impossible, and this may lead to a European collapse. The latter appears to be unavoidable because of the fact that Europe relies a lot on the United States of America, and the latter is not a reliable country, because USA itself is facing challenges from different sides especially from Russia, China and North Korea. So, all these political conditions urge, in a way or another, a potential decline, if Europe does not know how to unite its members into a powerful community having common views, interests and especially common decisions.

3.6- Potential Italian and French Exit from EU

The British exit from European Union surprised not only the Europeans but also all people on the globe. It has indeed a bad effect on many countries all over the world, especially Europe. What was done by the British authorities encouraged, in a way or another,

many European political factions, especially the oppositions, to think about organizing the same referendums in their home countries. For instance, opposition politicians in France, Spain, Holland and Italy are still calling for leaving the EU which, according to them, has not brought the state of a decent life and great comfort to European citizens. The Brexit can be considered as an epidemic that has spread all over the continent. Italy, for example, has witnessed the emergence of a political movement, called Five Stars, which has revealed its intention to fight against the Italian membership in EU. The vice president of the lower house, Luigi Di Maio, showed several times his intention to reject the European currency Euro. He referred in many occasions to the French opposition leader Marie Le Pen who has the same idea in mind about the European community. He also insisted, in his intervention within the Italian parliament, that all European governments should decide to leave the fragile union through organizing referendums. Di Maio wants to send a message to Italians in particular that the European Union is on the way of collapse. He called to substitute the current currency Euro which is not effective in his view. For him, Euro does not benefit the southern countries but only the rich side represented by the North. He called then for having two different currencies for both sides the South and the North. One could say that the Di Maio's speech shows clearly the disagreements between the state members and the deep divisions within such community.

The potential French withdrawal from EU, called Frexit, can also be a bomb that may explode at any time as Marie Le Pen is still fighting against the French membership. For her, the British decision to leave such weak community is the best example for Europeans, and it is indeed a good sign of weakness. She advocated the British decision from the beginning, and said that France had multiple problems than Britain had. She added that her country faced both the problem of the European currency Euro and the issue of Schengen space. Because of the unpleasant situation, experts in the field of politics referred to the danger that might be faced by the European Union which, according to

them, would undoubtedly collapse sooner or later.

3.7-Conclusion

It is generally known that Union came to existence after Europeans had suffered from hard economic and political circumstances during the post-war period. The leaders succeeded to unite themselves into one community. Today, Europeans are not sure about the continuity of their union and its future. The latter seems to be ambiguous, and the effectiveness of such confederation is far from reach. The European citizens are living a bitter reality when they see their heads unable to solve the minimum of internal problems as well as the international ones. They have also blamed them of not studying and discussing the future of Union very well. Many problems have remained unsolved since the foundation of the European Community such as the relation with Britain which finally decided to leave Union and it probably encourages other countries, like Italy and France, to follow the same way.

The issue of the Turkish integration can also be the source of the European collapse. Turkey belongs to the continent and it is an important member in the NATO and its incorporation gives power to the European Union. This means that the opposition voices that are calling for rejecting the Turkish membership, they are calling for the destruction of the European Continent instead of rebuilding it. So, the relation with Turkey is a good opportunity for Europe to strengthen its position in the world, but unfortunately the reality is the contrary. One could notice that the European Union is facing many challenges which may have a negative impact on its existence in the future. Many factors could be the source of potential weakness and collapse. In addition to the hesitancy towards Turkey, the European leaders are also having a conflict with the Trump administration which has shown its intention to review the compromise with Europe that was reached decades ago. Trump did not hesitate to ask Europeans to pay more if they wanted to be protected by USA. This new American vision is also considered as another factor towards the European Union decline if USA decides to withdraw itself from NATO. The relation with Russia over the

issue of Ukraine and its intention of extending its territories is another problem for EU. So, all these factors, previously mentioned, can play a negative role in leading the European Union to weakness and probably to divorce between the member states. One could say that the European Union is on the brink of collapse; it is indeed threatened to be dissolved one day, and Europe will be no more united.

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