

## **Göttweig Declaration 2015**

With Austria, Finland and Sweden joining the European Union twenty years ago, it was enlarged to 15 members and the borders of the Union were moved to the former cold war rift-line. This enlargement has been the only one in the history of European integration so far which strengthened the EU's economic potential. All European Union enlargements have had in common the strengthening of the area of political stability and democracy. They have also strengthened human rights, the protection of minorities in Europe and Europe's economic potential in global competition. At the same time, new challenges have put the European integration project to the test. Europe needs to create new investment stimuli for the economy and to fight high (youth) unemployment, while at the same time being exposed to attempts at geostrategic power shifts and to new security threats. In addition, the confidence of European citizens in the EU institutions' capacity to act and take decisions has been weakened. It is in particular the issue of geopolitical developments that requires a renewed discussion on the EU's role as a player and on its willingness to take action on an international level.

For twenty years now, the European Forum Wachau has dealt with basic questions on European integration and its further development in the (central) European context, always incorporating civil society.

In the light of the challenges described, it is of particular importance to deepen the discourse with European citizens and to critically review the current status of the European integration process, identifying possible solutions on a national and regional level in the interest of European citizens:

- 1.) The security policy context of the Union is marked by increasing degrees of instability and unpredictability, having immediate effect on the security of European citizens. Apart from classical threat scenarios (such as military disputes and violations of international law, migration flows caused by transitions in the European neighbourhood, transnational crime and pandemics), there are also new and continually changing threats (such as hybrid warfare, the entire cyber and IT sector as well as global terrorism coming to the fore more and more markedly). If the EU wants to do justice to these challenges, it is required to develop into a genuine security provider to guarantee comprehensive security for Europe's citizens in a globalised world. This is why Europe needs a security policy vision as a global player and a deepening of security policy cooperation. It will be essential to further develop and improve the necessary civil and military potentials.

- 2.) Since 2009, the European Union has passed three macro-regional strategies: one for the Baltic Sea region, one for the Danube region and one for the Adriatic and Ionian region. The strategy for the Alpine region is being finalised. This new type of approach must be kept up as another contribution towards Europe's capacity for innovation. The formation of macro-regions creates new awareness and makes macro-regional identities more evident. Flagship projects in the regions, intended to support job creation and prosperity, have to foster this still unusual and sometimes complex form of cooperation in the macro-regions. This cooperation needs to be deepened even further by including all relevant stakeholders from the fields of economics, environmental protection, transport and culture.
- 3.) Some of the first measures introduced by the new EU Commission were to promote growth and employment and to position the EU as a credible political and economic global player. Bearing in mind the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, overregulation must be avoided in this context in the interest of the citizens and of the economy. It is necessary, however, to define in detail areas in which "more Europe" is required so that strong economic performance will serve as a lever for more security and prosperity. A Europe with a thriving economy guarantees sustainable prosperity and security for the citizens of Europe.
- 4.) Cultural cooperation is a form of soft power and thus an opportunity to shape long-term relations between countries to their mutual benefit; it has recently gained growing importance. Culture will remain a competency of the member states. Nevertheless, the EU strives to intensify cultural cooperation with third countries, above all with those in the immediate neighbourhood, as a measure of supplementing the political and economic efforts of the individual EU countries. In the context of enlargement it is particularly evident that the element of culture strongly contributes to the Union's attractiveness. Deepening cultural cooperation is thus an integrative link between the Union and its European neighbours.

Notwithstanding the challenges to which the EU has to rise, further strengthening of regional cooperation is essential. We must form closer social and cultural bonds within the EU and in particular within central Europe in order to keep project Europe moving forward.