

First Academic Forum, 1 October 2019

The first in a series of Academic Forums held within the framework of a research project 'The Integral Theory of the Future of the European Union', led by prof. dr. Matej Avbelj, was intended to discuss the most imminent challenges of the future of the EU. That is exactly why the debate was initiated by the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Slovenia, H.E. Sophie Honey, who spoke about Brexit and the current situation in the UK. She emphasized that the UK is keen to reach a deal with the EU, so the Prime Minister promised to make concrete proposals shortly. The point of contention still lies in the Irish backstop (which stipulates that the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland will remain open even if the UK leaves the EU) and therefore appropriate alternatives are still being sought. In the case of reaching them, the UK could reach the deal with the EU and maintain open borders on the island. At the same time, even after exiting, the UK wants to have a strong partner relationship with the EU.

Also, mag. Igor Mally (State Secretary and Head of the Slovenian EU Presidency 2021) pointed out that Brexit represents a very important challenge for the future of the EU. As other challenges he exposed the EU budget and the problems posed by the modern, globalized world. He then spoke about Slovenia's Presidency of the EU Council, beginning in the second half of 2021. He addressed Slovenias' priorities in the time of the presidency which include: the circular economy, digitization, artificial intelligence, social convergence, climate changing, security issues, the role of the EU in the global world and also concrete country problems. The final content draft sure depends on the political priorities of all three countries that preside together, following a joint rotation of six months (Slovenia is joined by Portugal and Germany), as well as of the European Commission, the Council of the EU and other institutions and is to be set half a year before the beginning of Slovenia's presidency.

The third discussant, prof. dr. Peter Jambrek, one of the authors of the Ljubljana Initiative or New draft Treaty for the Constitution of the European Union, also presented his perspective on the future of the EU. He stressed that the current EU legislation can no longer solve all the issues and challenges and therefore the adoption of a new EU Constitution is needed. He then outlined the main idea behind the initiative, based on the defined, confirmed and protected external borders of the EU, which will confirm the inside freedom and open borders in the EU. Only in this case the EU will be able to act in the appropriate way and will become a powerful force in the global politics.

This idea was also confirmed by prof. dr. Matej Avbelj, who pointed out that the EU must transform into a political union to achieve the order again. It is the Ljubljana Initiative, also known as the idea of an EU Constitution, that demonstrates that the political union can be reached and without exhausting the Member States. According to prof. dr. Avbelj, this is the only way in which the EU can solve crises in real time and maintain order within the EU. However, future EU Member States' exits are not yet to be expected.