On 1 March 2017, European Commission (EC) President Jean-Claude Juncker presented the *White Paper on the Future of Europe* to the members of the Commission and the European Parliament (EP), as well as the European public at large. This document is aimed at helping the 27 EU Member States take major decisions on the direction the EU will take and its development after the United Kingdom leaves it and in the increasingly complex global framework. It is already clear that the options proposed in the White Paper lack serious vision. Notably, the absence of enlargement in considerations of EU future indicates lack of vision, as well as the Commission’s increasingly frequent “forgetfulness” when it comes to this policy.

The decision on the future of the EU27 will be taken by the European Council at the end of the year. The national parliaments, the EP, regional and local centres of the Member States and civil society will in the meantime discuss the ideas and scenarios set out by Mr. Juncker, as well as other (sectoral) analyses the EC will prepare during the year. The first opportunity to exchange opinions will arise already on 27 March 2017, at the EU27 Summit in Rome and the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome that laid the foundations of today’s Union. This meeting of the 27 Member States was preceded by consultations of the four largest states (France, Germany, Spain and Italy) in Versailles on Monday, 6 March 2017, at which they clearly supported the third scenario or “multi-speed Europe”.

The White Paper has two parts. The first, honest and alarming at times, is an impressive assessment of the situation in the EU today, in terms of the chief indicators and main global players. The second offers five different yet possible scenarios of the EU’s future until 2025. The scenarios are defined as a counterbalance to the so-called binary choice of “more or less Europe” and may be combined to produce a totally new outcome.
The mere fact that the EU as an idea or project provided 70 years of peace to its Member States, if not the entire continent, is awe-inspiring. Also worthy of praise is the fact that the EU provides the most humanitarian aid (56%), which is not only a reflection of its wealth, but also of its values leading so many to still believe that it is the best place to live. The fact that the EU launched the largest multi-national research programme – Horizon 2020 – should be proof of its exceptional technological and other innovativeness. Nine EU Member States rank among the 20 most innovative countries in the world.\(^1\) The EU also leads in the efficient use of natural resources and fight against climate change.

There are, however, reasons for concern. The EU’s population will account for less than 5% of the global population by 2060 (as opposed to 25% in 1900). The average age of its population will be 45 by 2020 (it will be the oldest population globally). Forecasts are that its economic power will also wane, accounting for much less than 20% of the world’s GDP in 2030, down from around 22% today.

The second part of the White Paper provides short descriptions of the directions the EU27 might take: 1) Carrying on, which is expected to lead to the gradual improvement of cooperation in specific areas; 2) Nothing but the single market, i.e. reducing the EU27 to a single market due to its inability to reach agreement on other policies; 3) Those who want more will do more, or multi-speed Europe, countries that want to deepen cooperation will do so, while the others will join in if they want/need to; 4) Doing less more efficiently, with the EU focusing on specific areas, such as trade, migration, security, innovation...; 5. Doing much more together, under which the Member States would opt for sharing their power, resources and deciding on more and more policies, which is equivalent to the federalist vision of Europe.

The White Paper does not give advantage to any of the offered scenarios and expects the outcome to be “something in between”. The starting point for each scenario is that the 27 Member States move forward together as a Union, despite justified forecasts that maintaining the status quo will actually lead to its demise. The Member States’ and think-tanks’ reactions to the White Paper have varied, from the Franco-German ones increasingly subscribing to the multi-speed Europe option, to those, such as the Višegrad Four countries, which have been warning that unity and pulling in one direction are crucial to the EU’s future. Another important V4 message is that the EU should remain open to those sharing its values (human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and respect for human rights), including the Western Balkans and the EU’s Eastern neighbours.

\(^1\) The Global Innovation Index, [https://www.globalinnovationindex.org/analysis-indicator](https://www.globalinnovationindex.org/analysis-indicator) (accessed on 6 March 2017).
Many are disappointed by the offered options, and, notwithstanding the reasonable avoidance of the “more or less Europe” trap, the lack of vision is obvious. The legitimate question that arises is whether EU’s citizens really want just an efficient Europe or a Europe with an idea and values it consistently translates into practice. Is it wise and sufficient to offer “just” a more efficient Europe as an antidote to the growing populism, scepticism and nationalism?

Lack of vision is visible with respect to the enlargement issue as well. This is definitely one of the less popular issues among EU citizens, which is, consequently, avoided by the political elites as well. Key EU documents recognise that “a credible enlargement policy represents a strategic investment in Europe’s security and prosperity” Nonetheless, the shortsightedness of the analysis by Mr. Juncker’s Commission is reflected in the fact that it makes absolutely no mention of enlargement or the Balkans, of candidate or potential candidate countries. True, it does say that “Europe (?!)) is attractive to many of its partners. While no further accession to the EU is expected in the short term, the prospect itself is a powerful tool to project stability and security along our borders”. The analysis of the effects of each individual scenario, however, makes no mention of enlargement or of the effects any of the five scenarios might have on this particular policy, which is, indeed, much more than a policy. It is thus reasonable to raise the following question, and not only by our region: can the EU’s future be discussed without giving thought to the future of enlargement? The past, and thus the future of EU integration entails expanding the area of stability, democracy, rule of law and prosperity to an increasing number of European states that fulfil the well-known criteria and membership requirements. As the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini said, she prefers the word reunification to enlargement of the Union “because the Balkans are already part of Europe”.

---

I can thus only reiterate the appeal by Serbian civil society organisations after the National Convention on the EU met with Ms. Mogherini during her recent visit to Belgrade, that Serbia and the region engage in the discussion on the future of the EU, which may be our home as well, and that deliberations on the EU’s future include the enlargement issue. Civil society organisations, the academia and the states in the region need to review and define their suggestions and responses to the EC’s proposal, as well as all other ideas that will be part of the European public discourse in the coming months. Rather than waiting for an invitation from Brussels, they must prepare themselves and proactively review how each of the potential and likely scenarios of EU’s future reflect on our European future, as well as how we perceive the EU’s future and development. We are voicing an even more important appeal to EU Member States and the EC, to be open, as well as farsighted, to this issue when they discuss the future of “EU27plus”. And finally, we call on and appeal to all European organisations and think tanks, politicians and stakeholders preparing to react to the White Paper – do not forget that the debate on EU’s future must include a discussion on enlargement, as well as the unambiguous reaffirmation that enlargement entails the Western Balkan countries.

* The author is a member of the Research Forum and Secretary General of the European Movement in Serbia

The views and opinions expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the European Movement in Serbia.