

# EUROPEAN UNION BETWEEN UNILATERALISM AND MULTILATERALISM. A GLANCE OVER THE RISE OF EUROPEAN POPULIST EXTREMISM

*Zsolt-Szilveszter SANDU\**

**Abstract.** *Progress, technological advancement, common market, peace and welfare are all some terms to which the European Union was used until recently. The migrant crises, rise of populist extremism and the effects of transition and post-transition in some of the member states are playing a vital role in deciding either on further unilateralist or multilateralist approaches of the management of the current situation. This paper is trying to identify the main identity cliché transitions from traditional to modern approaches, including the eventual resetting of the political class and reaching a consensus between old and new values we need to embrace in order to keep moving forward towards progress and prosperity.*

**Keywords:** *Traditionalism, Modernism, Unilateralism, Multilateralism, Populism, Extremism*

The European Union was born, in different stages, as a reaction of the European states to ensure economic, social and political peace and stability, respectively, to prevent a new World War. As a result, the foundation of European construction was set up by the initiative of Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, through the supranational authority called the European Coal and Steel Community (Gillingham, 2004: 363). This process was followed by the establishment of the European Economic Community, where it arose the common economic market (Paxton, 1992: 7-9). Thus, due to the ideological concentration to have an economically, socially and politically stable continent, in 1993 the Maastricht Treaty resulted in an uncut diamond of modern European democracy but with many traditional reminiscences. An ideology is a set of comprehensive and coherent ideas that explains and analyzes social conditions, thus helping citizens understand their place in society. In addition, this set of ideas is systematized, hierarchized and structured as a genetic critique of ideas.

The European Union has begun to develop as an economic and political society, with a tradition of inheritance from every European actor who helped shape it. Thus, traditionalism was associated with a characteristic part of the then social, cultural and social society (Shils, 1981: 6). Moreover, the first six states (Germany, France, Italy and the Benelux countries) promoted traditionalism through its ideologies, giving traditionalist valences to European ideology which was to materialize in international relations and foreign affairs (Needler, 1996: 198). Over time, new European actors have joined the Union, so new ideologies with fresh principles have begun to attack traditionalist thinking deepened into the individualist valences of older states. With the infusion of new principles, the EU Member States have begun to understand that in order to have a

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\* Ph.D(c), Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, E-mail:sandu.szilveszter@gmail.com

prosperous and united Europe, it must rely more on cooperation, openness and inclusion of all European issues, starting from the social side to the economic side or politics (Buonanno, Nugent, 2013: 94-95).

### **1. Traditionalism**

The traditionalism is a reaction to modernism, liberalism and radicalism. The word tradition comes from Latin, from the verb *tradere* and means to move on or down. Thus, from an etymological point of view, tradition signifies an affirmation or the action of transmitting from one generation to another a model, ideology or habit (Sedgwick, 2004: 21). Traditionalism in essence means reorienting an ideology or thinking towards the past, to the habits of long ago, believing that past actions were what they have brought us today, so they are worthy of respect (Bullock, Verpoest, 2011: 190). The consensus on traditions in a society is limited not only by the restrictions that arise as a result of unequal opportunities, but and resistance. Resistance is present in several forms and motives. One of these reasons is to attach to the indigenous traditions of a particular sector of a society, to which a foreign tradition is presented. We also encounter an aversion to the upper class and the refusal to give respect, which is implicit in accepting the traditions of the majority. In some groups, especially linguistic and ethnic groups, such resistance is accompanied by the accentuation and reinterpretation of indigenous traditions tending to revive or consolidate an indigenous tradition threatened by a concurrent tradition. Individuals turn indigenous tradition into a doctrine or an ideology. Resistance guarantees the heterogeneity of cultural tradition. In addition, heterogeneity increases the accountability of traditions due to alternatives and implicitly and sometimes explicitly criticizes traditions. Despite the resistance, the traditions of different layers influence each other. Resistance does not prevent syncretism; this is often a condition of syncretism. The power of foreign traditions opposes too much to be permanently blocked. Those who resist have already assimilated elements of the new tradition they are struggling with, resulting in a mixture of individual tradition and foreign tradition, and thus creating a new ideology reinterpreting an indigenous tradition. The same process of resistance, acceptance and blending takes place in migrating traditions from one society to another. Usually these reactions have a nationalist character based on a traditional reaction, which is normal because the national is traditional. These foreign ideologies, better traditions borrowed from other nationalities, try to reconstitute the national essence of an ideology to look like this (Shils, 1981: 246).

The period before 1989 was marked, globally, by the confrontation between liberalism and communism as instinctual ideologies where each proclaimed a model of a particular society and boasted as the creator of the free society. This is the widespread presentation of the West-East conflict, which was based on these two ideologies. In Western countries, the model of systems was based on a liberal-democratic political system operating in the context of capitalist economy and the defense of individuals' rights. This was the model of the free society. From a political point of view it was characterized by the pluralism of the political parties, who competed for power, by separating the powers in the state and the values of constitutionalism. To some extent, the legal review of the executive. From an economic point of view, it included the commitment to create a free-market system where the means of production were owned by the private sector; however, the post-World War II Western states have been characterized several times as users of a mixed economy where the state had a considerable proportion of productive resources. Here was the contribution of social democracy, a form of socialism that sought to use the power of states to mitigate market

inequalities. Social democracy was a strong player on the ideology scene characterized as the traditional ideology of the end of the 20th century.

The ideology of communism was opposed, in theory and practice, to this model of exuberant liberal democracy in the context of mixed economics. The ideal in this case was found in a planned society, controlled by a single party supposed to act in the interest of everyone in a society in which everyone was equal, and in which the division of conflicts between social classes was removed by collectivization productive resources. The rationality behind this controlled society wished to be the factor that would lead to the state's disappearance as an administrative entity and thus to proclaim its superiority over the West from the point of view of equality, planning and rational use of resources (Schwarzmantel, 2008: 8-10). In addition to social democracy and liberalism, traditionalism represented the rails that brought the wagon conservatism. Conservatism is the doctrine that claims that the reality of any society can be found in its historical development, so it is the best guide for governments, not to interfere with what has once been established in history. This doctrine emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to the nationalist projects of the French Revolutionaries. In addition, this doctrine describes society as an entity that grows, grows and grows roots, leaving leaves dry and undeveloped. As a rule of this doctrine, political parties must respond to the changing circumstances of a society (Kuper, 2003: 131). Conservative political doctrine can be defined as a set of ideas that aim at organizing and leading a society by preserving for a long time the traditional political structure. In its inception, conservatism advocated, in opposition to liberalism, the monarchy as a form of government (Miroiu, 2012: 42-53). Conservatives also argued that political institutions were the product of a long-lasting development. Their change by humans would be done against eternal laws, conservatives claiming that changes are in fact brutalizes of history. Conservatives claim that the political institutions are the effect of a long-term development. Changing it by humans would take place against the eternal laws, the changes being brutalization of history. Also, this doctrine is based, as does the liberal doctrine, on the principles of the rule of law. It supports the ideas of people's inequality and the need for distinct and hierarchical social classes. The primary characteristics of conservatism are the private property, religion, the defense of social order and supports the inequality of individuals and classes in society. This doctrine has two ramifications: classical conservatism, which supports the idea of preserving traditional institutions against the changes envisaged and sustained by the liberal doctrine; neo-conservatism, which sustains the traditional political institutions created on the basis of liberal doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

In conclusion, we can state that the European Union has used the traditional stream to develop different ideologies and doctrines that will structure its transition to modernity. These doctrines, with a traditional ramification, were the basic structure for the Member States wishing to complete the European Union. Through these traditional ideologies, Member States have made their way to a future that is represented by the Union they are part of today, but the question is how important it is for the good of the European Union, from an economic, social and political point of view, if these states continue to follow a much more open doctrine towards modernity, taking into account the globalization and all the similar phenomena that 50 years ago were nonexistent or too little visible.

## **2. Modernity**

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<sup>1</sup> *Conservatorismul*, Politicaromânească.ro, <http://www.politicaromaneasca.ro/conservatorismul-200>, accessed 12.05.2018.

Modernity refers to a historical period that has manifested itself in Western Europe through a series of cultural, social and economic events around the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This period is characterized by the increase of the scientific consciousness and instrumental secularization of reality, industrial society growth, social mobility, market economy, bureaucratization and the consolidation of nation-states. The last characteristic, but also the most important, is the birth of the concept of a free, autonomous, self-controlling and profoundly thoughtful person. In contrast to traditionalism, modernity can be described as a concept of social and individual experiences that are shared by all the citizens of the world through technological expansion and innovation, profoundly democratic political models, and the disappearance of the borders of nation-states. Essentially, modernity is a more esthetic form of a set of ideas and ideological principles of globalization. This ideology is accompanied by changes in the self-perception of the European citizen and reshapes on certain level the modern institutions (Kuper, 2003: 546). On the other hand, there is no standard definition for modernity because, in its essence, modernity is characterized by versatility, fluidity and it is bringing new changes in society. It is a process that has been constantly present since the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the mindset of western states, trying to analyze this phenomenon of modernity and globalization (Bryk, 2008: 10). Modernity and its familiar terms, namely modernity and modernization, exist as a topic of discourse quite often encountered in literary criticism in the history of science, public policies or political programs. This ideology "attacks" tradition, obsolete normative acts, stagnation, political and economic sclerosis, underdevelopment and fundamentalism of any kind. As topics promoted by the ideology, we encounter progress, development, growth, accumulation, flexibility, revolutions, reforms and conscious changes on various- but interlinked fields. Modernity can be described as an era focused on the future, certainly designed to be different as a present and better than the past. With the advent of the idea of progress and accumulation of wisdom, the enlightenment has emerged, opening up a new horizon that predicted evolution of the social. It was manifested as a loss of what was from the etymological point of view and retrospectively made understandings and meanings of the political concepts of reforms and revolutions that later became key words. Due to rapid trade growth, through industrial revolution and innovative discoveries in science, we can say that the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century can be characterized as a definitive and flawless victory of modernity in Western Europe (Therborn, 1995: 3). The complexity of modernity has developed not only due to the revival but also to the enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Jacobin Revolution, but also to the British industrial empire that has never forgotten the models of antiquity. However, Karl Marx believed that "the rebirth of the dead served in these cases as a comparison of the glorification of the new and not to parody the antiquity". He also said that "exaggerations must be avoided in the application of the new ideology and do not escape from finding solutions in reality" (Idem, 1995: 4). The European history of the second half of the last millennium mostly had a revolutionary role, in the sense of periods of time sustained by society where the exclusive competition with the potential to claim control over a European state or a part of it, has been discussed. Therefore, the first period was covered by the consolidation of modern states, regardless of whether they were absolutist dynasties and by exception, constitutional monarchies or a bourgeois republic like the Netherlands. The instauration of nation-states as a product of the manifestation of the nation's sovereignty was the most exclusive and central issue of the second era of the European revolutions. The lack of clear limitations which mark the difference between internal and external, as well as an internal connectivity forming a pronounced interdependence of the delimited population, leads to internal conflicts

linked to the discussions at the organizational level of a whole. The consolidation of these states and spreading the power of the judiciary, fiscal and military networks has enriched the importance of legitimacy as well as its rules (Idem, 1995: 21-22). As far as culture is concerned, the lack of it has become a major state problem in the 19th century, so political measures have been taken to support it. In all European countries, policies have been developed to promote the reduction of illiteracy and a more efficient development of education, thus promoting urbanization as an assertion of power of the nation-state and the industrial revolution. As the demand for skilled workers has continuously risen due to the industrial revolution, so have the efforts of most liberal governments which have supported and promoted education. As measures to support modern culture, we can mention the following: modernization of school curricula, modernization of textbooks, and the introduction of the free-of-charge primary education which also became mandatory (Delanty, 2013: 287-288). These measures have led to an increase in numbers of pupils attending a primary education course with different qualifications, positively influencing the growth and development of the. Also, thanks to the new European citizen with a meditative and free thinking, the nation-states ordered the establishment of associations that promoted the culture of national academies that played a role of cultural authority, allowing the manifestation of cultural events with exhibitional role and invested in urbanism, thus creating numerous public edifices such as libraries, university campuses and cultural monuments for its citizens. In the twentieth century in Europe, most of the legislation on education focused on setting up new schools, better development and structuring of secondary and higher education, and enriching the education system with technical or craft schools (Idem, 2013: 290). Thus, we can say that modernity helped the new democratic states in a better approach to educational policy, understanding that it is better to invest in specialists and educated people in contrast to totalitarian states where traditionality proved to be rigid and too conservative in terms of education and culture. In the same century, budget investments in education increased, thus increasing the development of education but also creating a new objective, namely lifelong learning. In conclusion, the ideology of modernity supported the development of the nation-state as an independent state, especially built in Europe with a European consciousness based on a history at least common with the other European states, reflecting the European citizen's aspiration to delimit himself from Balkan-, Russian- or oriental influences. This trend motivates the European actors to take steps to structure the current European Union, which includes European institutions and a modern European legislative frameworks that promotes a centralized political, administrative and economic system to ensure an everlasting well-being of the citizen. In addition, modernity was helped by the wave of scientific innovations, thus managing to consolidate its principles through new technologies. As far as agriculture is concerned, modernity promotes a sustainability, which again proves the tendency oriented towards the future. As far as the modern European citizen is concerned, thanks to new technologies, he has access to a large field of multicultural exchanges and the knowledge of identities which compose the European Union (Richards, 2004: 53-54).

### **3. Transition**

Commonly, transition can be defined as a shift of path triggered by change in order to bring the state towards stability. Transitions are characterized by several dynamic steps, milestones, final results and turning points (Meleis, 2010: 11). The economic transition appears as a need when a new ideology is adopted by a state, and once adopted, new values and rules emerge in the economic field. An economic transition is rather

complicated and difficult because it is manifested by privatizations or restructurings where all these complementary changes must be made without disturbing the state's economy too much, as it must continue to function, its role being to cover many of the populations needs. An economic transition must also be supported by the political platform in order not to create flawed policies or to be changed too often in the transition process (Roland, 2000: 2). The transition at the level of the political class begins as a result of some events which determine the state to change its ideology. In this case, the entire political structure will go through a period of transition or restructuring, in order to improve its efficiency. Sometimes, these pressures that call for change are of a civic nature, when citizens feel the need for a transition to an ideology closer to them. This pressure is largely manifested by revolutions or manifestations in the streets. Another pressure comes from the political actors themselves, where often after the elections, the new political power has a new vision of the country's ideology, and thus a transition to a new set of ideas takes place (Codato, 2006: 2-3). At any time of transition, we will encounter phases of adoption of the new rules, and in these periods of adoption, the social, economic and legal status is confusing and chaotic, so in a state affected by a transition period we encountered problems in the social area as well as the lack of clear information for citizens regarding some procedures in their relationship with the state, such as dividing the town hall institution into new departments, which may lead to a sense of insecurity and misinformation. In order to avoid such situations and to ensure the functionality of the system from a sociological and psychological perspective, but also the maintenance of the social order, a set of instruments of pressure or persuasion should be applied and followed, namely organized and unorganized, implicit and explicit, direct or indirect, formal or informal, conscious and diffuse. All of these have the purpose of social stability in the state and also try to influence individuals to adopt legal conduct and to comply with the norms of the community or society they live in (Ciuchi, 2011: 245-246). As economic consequences, an economic transition may be the key to prosperous economic growth or the opportunity for state fraud and a high degree of corruption in influencing the approval of preferential fiscal or economic policies.<sup>2</sup> In conclusion, the phenomena of transition, ideologically, economically or culturally, affects a state largely in a positive way, but if the process is not managed and enforced by rules, it can lead a state towards crisis and chaos in all respects. Thus, the transition must be understood, monitored and implemented in the smallest detail in order to avoid creating breaches between the old and the new system. In this case breaches can become tools which might be exploited by individuals in bad faith, with a potential negative effect upon the entire society.

#### **4. Post-Transition and Normality**

Once the transition period approaches the end, the state in which this phenomenon is taking place is entering into a reshaping period where the new ideologies are already partly absorbed by the system and a more careful motorization is assessed by evaluating certain indicators that are related to the new change. We can say that the state has largely absorbed most of the sets of new ideas and concepts but they still have to go through a period of consolidation they find their place in society. All the changes must be monitored and analyzed to a certain extent by both citizens and institutions. Post-transition is a

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<sup>2</sup>*The Social And Employment Consequences Of Privatization In Transition Economies: Evidence And Guidelines*, B., Martin, Interdepartmental Action Programme on Privatization, Restructuring and Economic Democracy, <http://publicworld.org/files/ilotransition.pdf>, pp. 13-23, accessed 16.05.2018.

bridge towards the new normality for the host state which comes along with implementing a level of modernity accepted by the state. Essentially, post-transition means a deeper harmonization in terms of social, political and economic new doctrine that will dictate the degree of modernity of the state.

Normality is the assimilation of socially, economically and politically accepted rules, principles, values and norms. Also, the state of normality means a period of balance from all points of view. With the beginning of the normality period, the post-transition period is considered to be over. Normality is the happy moment when a state comes out of the transition period because the transition is not only a stage but an entire process (Neumann, Heinen, 2012: 441-442). As relevant steps for this work, we consider that the internal transition and the external transition that manifests itself in the phenomenon of changing the ideology of a state, but also in the state of accession of a state to the European Union necessarily have an impact on the period of time it also manifests itself on the finite results of this process. Through inner transition we can understand that a state is going through a shock therapy to infuse a new ideology. The process takes place in a limited time and practically summarizes a whole historical process that would have lasted for centuries and changes the dynamics of the state in structuring rules and laws that are pleasant to the new system to be assimilated. This inner transition is a sign of stopping a supposed European isolation and the first step in entering the European experience. The external transition is an effort made by EU Member States to create policies, norms and regulations that are applicable not only to European niche but also to new states willing to join this supranational structure. Also, the external transition is a direct leap into a modernity that, for other European member states, means normality.<sup>3</sup> If there was a better optimization of the transition process, a new political, social and economic ideology, the only step that should be changed is actually an essential factor within each stage, namely, time. Following the analysis of the process of transition from traditionalism to modernity, we noticed that modernity cannot exist without tradition. This is because everything is new, innovative, needs solid foundations to develop, and in our case the foundation of modernity can be nothing more than traditionalism. In this case, we can see that through this pyramid structure, which has traditionalism as its cornerstone, followed by the transition with all its steps leading to modernity (which is always in continuous progress, tailored to current needs), the stages cannot be skipped in order to reach modernity on a shorter path. The only solution for achieving modernity starting from a system based on traditionalism can only be done through shortening the amount of time needed for the process to take place. Shortening time can be done by implementing simple bureaucratic solutions, and by streamlining institutions from the local to the national level, so that all the transition process, including the inner and outer elements, to be carried out in the most optimal conditions and centered on the citizen and its needs, thus saving time and resources that can then be invested in consolidating the new system. Thus, it is mandatory to preserve the tradition of transition towards modernity, having the same stages that have been structured, conceived and applied from one European generation to the next one.

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<sup>3</sup> *România în UE. Calitatea Integrării. Creștere. Competență. Ocupare, Ciclurile Tranziției, O Perspectivă Epistemologică Asupra Globalizării*, Marin, Dinu, [http://store.ectap.ro/suplimente/simpozion\\_23\\_nov\\_2007\\_ro\\_vol2.pdf](http://store.ectap.ro/suplimente/simpozion_23_nov_2007_ro_vol2.pdf), pp. 154-155, accessed 18.05.2018.

## **5. Tradition and the Process of Establishing It**

Globalization is a process in which more and more citizens become connected in different ways over the longest distances. Space becomes more and more irrelevant and most of the things we do, do not take territorial valences, and social relations no longer depend on a particular territory, becoming suprateritorial. Globalization can also be a compression of the world and an increase in consciousness that represents the world as a whole (Lechner, 2009: 15-16). It represents the transplanetary and supra-territorial extent of relations and connections between people and involves the reduction of barriers to global social contact. In addition, this phenomenon describes the rapid processes of intercontinental integration from an economic, social and political point of view (Wells, Shuey, Kiely, 2001: 37). The tradition has become difficult to establish because the forces of globalization have become heavily influential, especially with the development of technology, with a more accessible and fast-forward channel. From the point of view of the identity of a state, tradition is hard to establish because society is concerned with all the foreign and multicultural identities that come to them with the opening of borders and also with the possibility of studying any other identity due to technology and progress in telecommunications, being the most recent, efficient and powerful tool for spreading the power of globalization. The phenomenon of globalization incites states in the pre-transition period to speed up their transition to modernity with the help of external influences that have a global role and involves the influences of other states, and it remains to decide which of the conflicting traditions this phenomenon will reach to dominate and to make his way up to the modern system.

## **6. Resetting the Political Class**

Resetting the political class is a result of the struggle between tradition and modernity. In order to get from tradition to modernity in the true sense of the word, everything that is ineffective needs to be changed so that that segment of the system functions according to the needs of society. As a result, the political class is the one that requires first of all a restructuring and a reset, because as long as the state operated under the old system, they did not manage to control it. Thus, the failed policy has to be changed in order to increase the chances of functioning society under normal conditions under the new system. If, following the elections that are part of the reset of the political class, part of the new class will be old members, it will be proof that the confidence of those who vote is still unwavering, giving a new chance to its leaders for a new beginning. Otherwise, people with voting rights will choose new representatives in decision-making bodies, so that the modern system will be driven by fresh political figures, with new ideas and solutions. Through this process, equal chances are given to the old political class, but also to the new leaders waiting to become the solution to the problems they identified and to which the old system failed to bring about solutions. In addition, modernity is a filter that separates traditionalist ideologies, badly exploited by political representatives pursuing their own interest and not that of the country, we can consider modernity as a solution that refreshes the political scene of a state once it penetrates into its ideology. Resetting the political class is a slow and very rare encounter in contemporary societies. The majority of citizens who want to have such a process live in a society where their voice is no longer heard by the state where state interest is no longer close to the citizen, and politics has become more of a business for those who apply it and lead it a way to lead a society towards a prosperous reality. This process of resetting the political class has to go through a phenomenon of purification that can stretch over a long period of time because resetting is done gradually from one generation to the next, from one transition to



the next. Thus, as this reset process is shorter, some steps can be optimized. Firstly, the electoral cycle cannot be repeated in a consecutive manner, so the new political class will have new political representatives with a broader perspective. Also, candidates in the political class should be limited to mandates in their office, thus obliging them to impose an efficient schedule to his political agenda. In addition, no resetting of the political class can be manifested without an impulse coming from the electoral platform.

## **7. Conclusions**

In conclusion, all the factors that have been analyzed embrace the essence of development. The European Union needs characteristics of tradition and modernity to preserve its identity, but also to develop towards a more prosperous future. Traditionalism has been and represents the basis of the community building. Thus, we can see that the founders of the community space have tried to preserve a lost peace with the world wars and to impose some basic indicators that each state should develop and respect in order to remain in the Union. As a result, the ideology of traditionalism inspired each member state to preserve its national identity while pursuing a community objective. Besides, the legacy of the memories of traditional ideology was also a model for not being followed by the Union as totalitarianism, communism, and inequality of chances or exploitation of European citizens. As strong as traditional reminiscence, the European Union will continue to add new layers of history that will be used as a new basis for history to be written. As a result of technological development, and with the emergence of more and more problems where traditional-based systems could not find solutions, there was a need for change, reforming systems by developing them and increasing their efficiency. In response to these unresolved issues of traditionalism, modernism emerged, an innovative and flexible, fluid, and much more open system with the ability to focus its competences on the affected areas, and which was closer to the interest of European citizens. The road to change from traditionalism to modernity has not been a simple one, and it has sometimes been the result of the revolution or drastic reforms in society. Also, the transition from traditionalism to modernity cannot be produced directly, but only through a series of processes that must be taken in turn to reach their goal where normality is to be achieved. Thus, among this transitional processes we can enumerate the internal transition that takes place inside a state in the form of focusing on a clear and well-defined objective of restructuring specific policies in order to have easier access to the European community, but also to make a steps towards modernity and to the development of the state from an economic, social and political perspective. In addition to the internal transition, there will always be an external transition where host entities, in our case the European community, will make some effort to structure a set of community policies and rules, perhaps to a more accessible standard for new or accession states.

Consequently, there is a relation of interdependence between traditionalism and modernity. Progress cannot begin without a basis from which it can contrast the modern profile of a state. Although the European Union is based on elements of traditionalism from each individual member state, it will always go along the path of modernity. Only this way it will be effective and able to withstand the upcoming external influences and in the same time to ensure the welfare of the citizens of each and every member state, preserving altogether a common and modern European identity.

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