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LET'S COME TO LOVE!

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Hardly ever have the younger people in Bulgaria heard of the world famous Ukrainian writer Pavlo Zagrebelny. I am using the title of one of his novels in order to summarise my impressions from this year's State of the Union Address of the European Commission's President Jean-Claude Juncker to the Members of European Parliament in his one-hour summary-vision on the State of the Union. Not because the first Zagrebelny's novel is „Europe, 1945”, but because one of his three novels that are translated into Bulgarian is namely that one – „Let's Come to Love” (1971). Moreover, in every one of its chapters the following refrain is being repeated: „Oh, how often we, the people, take what we wish as reality”. At least, that was what I was thinking about while I was listening to this year's Address that the people present in The House of Europe in the morning on 13th September could follow live – some of them were even commenting that it had been the most constructive and optimistic since that format of a dialogue between the EC President and the European public ever exists.

Frankly, I had the feeling that a shower of Perseids was falling from the ceiling of the full – to a certain extent – plenary room of the EP in Strasbourg, and Juncker was trying to have at least one dearest wish for each star, full of hope that it would come true. If you think I exaggerate, you can look at least at the press release, in which 22 (twenty-two) key messages are presented.[1]

In this long list of the programme priorities, officialised by the EC, we are impressed mostly by the beginning and the end. In the beginning, actually, in a biblical manner, turns to be... the Word.

Because, in Juncker's words, in his very much „personally suffered” sixth scenario for the future of Europe it is explicitly emphasised that namely the value-related foundation of the European integration is primarily important. And in his opinion, it is built upon the triumvirate of freedom, equality of opportunities and the rule of law. Freedom, however, turned to be – firstly and solely – freedom of speech. The other freedoms which you can think of: the



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freedom of movement, of property use, of religious beliefs, of personal self-identification – just as examples, are not exactly of the same rank of political priority. But, on the other hand, Juncker made an extensive own interpretation of the classical American idiom „freedom is not free”, emphasising on the fact that this value is neither given for granted, nor would we have it if we don't fight for it constantly.

The equality of opportunities, however, turns to be the second key cause for Juncker, because he absolutely and without any alternative stood *against* the division of the Union of a nucleus and periphery and declared himself *for* the equal value of all European citizens – in their right of labour, but also in that of payment, and also of quality of consumer goods, and also in their rights as voters. For which we shall, most sincerely, be grateful to him and shall payback him with a due benevolence.

The cause for rallying the Union could actually be followed as a common “red thread” in the overall speech of Juncker. It goes through the emphasis on the two – East and West – “lungs of the EU”, without the synchrony of which Europe would become out of breath. And also in the emphasis on the sufficiency of the present EP (in opposition to Macron's idea of a separate parliament and budget for the Eurozone states). Next comes the significant idea about new, but legal migration ways to Europe. And it goes even to the commercial benevolence to Mexico, Australia and New Zealand. And so on.

We come to universal love, really.

And, in the end, we reach the rule of law, about which it is even better to refer to the German formulation *Rechtsstaat* to make the pun that the EU is not a state, but a „rule-of-law state”. I say „in the end” because, as you can also see in the pressrelease, the EC has put the rule of law at the end of the list. There is its place including in the roadmap for the implementation of the EU

political agenda [2], about which Juncker boasted that it had been already sent to the heads of state of the EU Member States. It will be as earliest as October next year when it reaches the protection mechanisms of the rule of law. It doesn't matter that this very EP obliged the Commission last year to develop a mechanism for the protection of the main freedoms within a year. Juncker didn't say a word about the implementation of this key task assigned to him – still, the EC is a guardian of *the treaties of the Union*, not of the Union itself. For now.

And what stands in the beginning of the EU political priorities list we all know well – trade, of course [3]. “*Partners across the globe have started lining up at our door to conclude trade agreements with us. (...)*”. How could one not think of Zagrebelny's novel!

Actually, *the state of the Union*, as is the title of the document presented by the President of the Commission to the attention of the European public, has not been paid much attention to in the whole speech. Except for the reference to the favourable facts on the economic growth and the unprecedented high employment rate of the workforce. Yet without an explanation of how come this as an achievement of the EU itself, but not of its citizens, entrepreneurs and companies. This is like listening to a report of the academic management team claiming as its own the achievements - of the people who actually have made discoveries and publications, without any direct input or cooperation of the management, boasting with the success.

However, the very intention of the political message was to sound optimistic and, due to this reason, neglecting the present in the name of the forthcoming is somehow understandable. Subsequently, the demonstrated neglect towards Great Britain, leaving the EU, is also explicable

– it was evident not so much in the direct ironic remark that ‘we all regret a lot about what has happened’ continued, after a short pause, with the conviction that ‘the British people will also regret it – soon...’. The attitude towards the leaving was demonstrated blatantly through the overall orchestration of the speech in which Juncker delivered in English only the very few introductory words and the most general opening phases. But the main body of the message was in French and German, so that it can be clear for everybody that the future of Europe is for those who have mastered the French-German – no, not language, but the French-German economic, political and social realities!

As I am saying „realities”, I get startled at once: from a person who claims that the time for debates on the future of Europe is over and that the time to act has come you expect to hear not just what he wants to happen most. It is very important for you to understand how exactly what you wish can become a reality – at least within the horizon of 2025.

In this respect, the address to the European community kept a deiform silence. Probably you have noticed that gods, as a rule, are silent about their intentions. At the best, they can send some unclear sign which the shivering with expectation fortune-tellers can interpret for the common mortals. Because that’s the formers’ job and it is crucially important, as people will do something anyway, but it would be good to know whether this would be in accordance with the divine providence or on the contrary.

Listening to the dozens of Juncker’s major aspirations, at least the ones with the greatest priority and the ones that are somehow specific, I was thinking all the time – and how can this happen exactly?

For example, elections for Members of EP with unified Pan-European lists. It sounds like a triumph of democracy, doesn’t it? But who is going to fill in these lists? Remember, for example, the Bulgarian party leaders represented in the EP or Nigel Farage who still continues to be a member of the European Parliament. I do not want to vote for candidates from a list arranged by the abovementioned and the like... And most certainly I do not associate the future of democracy in Europe particularly with this opportunity. I would say it with the words of Juncker himself: „European democracy deserves better.“

How is the merging of roles of the President of the Commission and the President of the European Council going to happen, at that – with the explicit insistence that in the present moment the last thing the EU needs is a change in the Union treaties?

How can the formatting of the position of some of the EU Commissioners into a new role of a EU Economy and Finance Minister happen productively, as it was proposed by Juncker? Firstly, as we had Baroness Ashton and now Mogherini as EU Foreign Ministers, would that mean that the EU already has a common foreign policy? Secondly, how exactly would the new minister take his role provided that in the national governments the ministers can undertake sectoral policies as long as there is a national budget behind them expropriating between 40% and 60% of GDP (and there wouldn’t be such a financial resource behind the new minister)? A new minister, without own resources for undertaking policies, wouldn’t be anything more than a supranational complaints office.

If somebody still remembers the failed Lisbon Strategy, how realistic would it sound to him/her that the European industries will „stay, or become, the number one in innovation,

digitisation and decarbonisation”? Who and how paved the way leading there (although „paving” is not the most appropriate expression when we talk about electronic industries and leadership in innovations)?

And so on – all the time such questions arise about all the rest...

I am going to repeat it: we, the Bulgarians, together with all the people from Eastern Europe, will be grateful to the present EC President for his strong determination to defend our strategic interests – for taking the Western Balkans out of the expansion freezer (at least for Serbia and Montenegro), and for institutional and financial instruments that are going to support the states in their way to the Eurozone membership, and for insisting that Europe is united from Spain to Bulgaria, for the statement that the citizens’ concerns will be cares of the Union itself...

“The whole question,” Ivan Hadzhiysky wrote in the past, “is: how is this going to happen?” And just like him Juncker obviously thinks that this will be clarified “some other time”...

To say the least, I expect from a Leader of the most influential and powerful, in terms of authority and resources, EU institution to be something more than a wise old man with brave personal visions of the future. It is particularly of the EC that I expect to step on a high-class expertise when it proposes more specific instrumental solutions for the Union’s problems – listed, not as if in a catalogue for all who wish anything, but listed in a ranking of urgency priority. The priority issues can be three, five, if it is necessary – even nine... But not 22. Even the EU does not have resources to work productively simultaneously on such a long list of priorities. If we can trust Juncker that he doesn’t intend to run for a second mandate, it seems strange that his speech, overflowing with

metaphors, sounds more like a pre-election message to an electorate of Winnie-the-Pooh-like people, for whom the most favourite is “a lot from everything”.

Due to this reason, I am going to let myself finish using the tone of the interpersonal familiarity demonstrated on a highest level as an expression of a political “bon ton” (including by Juncker for whom – let’s not forget – Boyko Borisov is “Mon Ami”):

Not like this, Bro!

I know that you are older and, in general, your advice should be a reference point for our life actions. However, in this case, I would like to trust my own evaluations on the future of the Union which I love and which I’m suffering for not less...

[1] See: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-3164_en.htm. I am presenting them in original in an appendix after the text.

[2] *Roadmap for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union*, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/roadmap-soteu-factsheet_en.pdf.

[3] „Firstly, I want us to strengthen our European trade agenda.“