

Conference "Democracy in EUROPE" at La Sapienza University of Rome: speech by Prof. Nemitz

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by Paul Nemitz

At this time, there is nothing to expect from governments that can lead to more democracy or more European integration. In Germany, Chancellor Merz insists on a significant reduction in the EU budget. The election victory of the right-wing nationalist AfD party in Saxony-Anhalt puts further pressure on the chancellor's party.

With regard to the electoral victory of the AfD in Saxony-Anhalt, I will just say this: this victory was only possible against the backdrop of Trump's electoral victory in the United States. After all, it is the United States that determines the political macroclimate. Willy Brandt also became chancellor only after Kennedy had brought a breath of fresh air to America. Just as Trump is now losing support in the United States, because people are learning that right-wing populists do not make sensible policies, the AfD in Germany will also lose support after some time, unless in the meantime the democratic parties themselves lose their temper and make serious mistakes. They must now continue their path of internal reforms. On Europe

, however, If, however, neither Germany, nor France nor Italy want to continue European integration, European democracy and the internal market, Europe will lose its importance in relation to the United States, China and even Russia, and it will also lose its attractiveness for citizens. Economic growth and democracy in all European countries will suffer. It is therefore necessary for a breath of fresh air to be raised in these three largest Member States in particular and responsibility for growth, security and democracy in Europe to be taken responsibility. This means that new ideas for Europe need to be put on the table: a new impetus towards greater cooperation and integration is urgently needed to offer the young generation a real democratic perspective and European hope.

Where can this initiative come from? From young civil society. It is young people who suffer most from disintegration and nationalism. Young people in Britain have realised this since Brexit. And young Americans under Trump are realising this. I therefore believe that it is right to focus on young people for a renewal of Europe. But above all on organised young people, i.e. those who are already committed to the European public interest in civil society, academia, journalism, the Church, trade unions or business. In Germany, there are many allies for this part of society with whom European integration can be pursued. However, it is precisely these committed young people, active outside the political parties, who are missing from the political parties themselves. European thinking, thinking about a common future for Europe, has almost completely dried up in the political parties in Germany (and if I see correctly, also in Italy and most of the other Member States). We need to take a constructive and courageous look back at the future of Europe in the democratic parties, through the kind of discussions we have had here today. We need to urge and support the parties, as well as join them ourselves, in order to create a new basis for the renewal of Europe within them. We should start doing this soon.

Indeed, without winning the commitment of the friends of Europe within the parties, in a future European Parliament, after the elections, there will be a lack of courage and enthusiasm, but also of the ideas and preparatory work necessary for a new constitutional foundation.

In order to change the treaties, Europe needs the approval of the governments of the Member States. At one point we thought that such approval would be easier to obtain after the United Kingdom left. But then others put the brakes on. Even Germany. Even after Poland and Hungary returned to the democratic centre, it remains difficult to achieve the majority needed for an intergovernmental conference to amend the Treaties. However, I believe that already an unbiased convention to work towards a **Charter of European Democracy**, alongside the Charter of Fundamental Rights, could be the spark for a new beginning and a breath of fresh air. Let us remember: work on the Charter of Fundamental Rights began at that time without deciding from the outset whether the Charter would be binding or not. This open approach then made it possible to move forward. I believe that a Charter on democracy in Europe, that is, democracy at EU level and in the Member States, can start in the same way. We will then see later whether the results of the work of a convention on such a Charter will allow all Member States to ratify it at parliamentary level, thus making it binding law, just as was finally the case with the Charter of Fundamental Rights. I have already written a great deal about this draft Charter of Democracy and I am happy to make myself available for further work in this direction.

Thank you