

## INTERVIEW WITH MÁRTON GYÖNGYÖSI

**Interviewed by:** Marko Paradžik <sup>1</sup>

Márton Gyöngyösi is a Hungarian politician, the Executive Vice-President of the Hungarian political party Jobbik. He was elected MP in the 2010 parliamentary election. Between 2010 and 2018 he served as the vice-chair of the Foreign Committee of the Hungarian National Assembly. He was the leader of Jobbik's parliamentary group from 2018 to 2019. He was elected a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) in the 2019 European Parliament election, as a result, he resigned from his seat in the national parliament.



### **Has your country seen more benefits or harm from joining the European Union from today's perspective?**

The accession to the European Union was a great opportunity for Central Europe, including Hungary, but we haven't really been able to utilize it. There are many reasons for that, but I think the most important one was the neglectful attitude of our governments: regardless of their ideological stance, the governments of the 1990s and 2000s have always regarded the European Union as an external force that would automatically solve all our problems without us needing to do anything. Furthermore, they even nurtured this misconception in people's heads, too.

On the other hand, the European Union was not quite interested

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<sup>1</sup>mag. iur., Dom hrvatskih veterana, Park Stara Trešnjevka 4, Zagreb, theodorospara@gmail.com

in how ready the new member states were and how they could be integrated into the system. Considering all these mistakes however, I still believe Hungary is certainly better off being inside the European Union than being in an eastern partnership or in the same category with the West Balkans.

**How important do you consider the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. keeping the autonomy of the jurisdiction over internal affairs for the Member States (e.g., education, culture, freedom of the media, etc.) for the future of the European Union?**

Subsidiarity is a key principle of the EU, but it is still surrounded by a lot of misunderstanding in my opinion. According to the principle of subsidiarity, affairs must be handled at the level where their management is the most favourable. This idea is rooted in the recognition that overly centralized systems tend to function inefficiently. We Hungarians clearly understand this, since the Hungarian government wishes to pull nearly all decisions to itself, including even the appointment of school principals. Some areas however, are quite logically managed through a central decision making process.

As far as the European Union is concerned, certain matters, such as the common foreign and security policy, the enforcement of the EU treaties or the measures against climate change are advisable to be managed at a higher EU level due to their very nature. In addition, there are some value-related issues, such as compliance with the democratic principles or the freedom of the media, which also belong to this category, because they affect all member states equally. In contrast, education and the arts are good examples of areas that should definitely be controlled at nation-state level, because they need to address local characteristics and they are closely connected to the language and culture of each nation, and

therefore are obviously best known locally.

### **What is your personal preference: the European Union as a federal state or as a confederation of sovereign nation-states, and why?**

I believe that a lot of things can fit into the notion of federation and confederation, too. These words can be filled with content almost at our own discretion. At present, I don't see how the EU could be transformed into a democratic federation, because many essential conditions are missing and, apart from the grandiose words, I don't see any nation-state with strong enough intentions to give up their positions in order to reinforce the European Parliament and weaken the Council's jurisdiction, or to radically change the nomination process of Commissioners. However, if we do want to move towards federalism, the only way is through direct citizen involvement. On the other hand, the relationship of EU member states is already much tighter than just a very loose confederation. Furthermore, we are already facing more and more challenges which no loose alliance can handle. The constant multilateral harmonization among the member states and the veto system keep slowing down the process to such a degree that when the EU finally comes to a decision, the issue is basically no longer on the agenda of world politics. In my opinion, the EU's only chance for long-term success is to simplify its relations with its citizens and allow a greater say for voters in between two elections as to what kind of politics they want the EU to pursue within each term.

### **Can the European Union be an equal power to Russia, China, and the United States in the future?**

The opportunity is there, but if we want the EU to have a political weight equal to its economic significance, we need major reforms indeed.

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**How well does the European Union articulate a common foreign policy today? Are you in favour of creating an EU army?**

As far as the professional and organizational framework is concerned, the apparatus to conduct an efficient EU foreign policy is already in place, but the two most important pillars of diplomacy are missing: political legitimacy and an army. Although the toolkit of diplomacy has changed significantly over the recent decades, you still can't conduct an assertive foreign policy without these two, which is clearly shown by how the EU has been stumbling through foreign policy challenges. We either find a solution for this problem within the next few years or the EU will become marginalized. I think this answers the questions related to catching up with the other great powers and the army, too.

**Given that the European Court of Justice may give a different judgement than the entire legal order of a Member State, is the judicial sovereignty of the Member States lost in this respect?**

If you identify initial pure statehood with a state (i.e., condition) where the country is completely sovereign without any limitations whatsoever, you can see that even the first signed bilateral contract chips a bit away from this full sovereignty, since both parties recognize the provisions of the contract as binding. The same applies to such multilateral contracts as the ones that have ensured the foundation and the functioning of the European Union. It's no secret that states give up a piece of their discretion when they sign international contracts but, apart from a few extreme examples, states are nonetheless happy to conclude agreements, as they put them in a more favourable position after all. Contracts need to be respected. In this regard, I don't really understand when certain politicians refuse to honour a commitment on the grounds of sovereignty. If a state, at its own discretion, decided to recognize

the EU law as binding or declared the primacy of EU decisions, it must comply with them and carry them out, respectively. If it wasn't like that, no contracts could be signed and no alliances could be made, since any party could upset them any time, which would go against everything humanity has learnt about diplomacy over the past millennia.

**Is the common currency suitable for all EU members, and how has the introduction of the EURO affected your country's economy?**

The common currency does not suit every member state. It only suits the countries that meet the necessary criteria, which is not always an easy task. That's all fine though, because we've learnt from Greece's example that the common currency's potential benefits come with certain risks. With that being said, the Euro is still a key achievement, but if you talk about its introduction, you mustn't disregard the importance of the integration of each national economy. So far Hungary has not adopted the Euro and, looking at the economic processes, I must say we are not ready, either. I hope it will change in the future.

**What are most resources coming from the European funds used for in your country?**

Just to mention a few examples, most EU funds have been used for such projects as the construction of fountains and silky smooth bicycle routes next to the potholed roads of depopulated villages, 1-metre high lookout towers in the flatland, or villas registered as hotels but then used as a local pro-government oligarch's residence. I could also mention the public lighting systems modernized by a company owned by the Prime Minister's son-in-law, which managed to engulf previously well-lit settlements in such

deep darkness that even the road traffic statistics showed the increased number of accidents. Of course, these are just the projects uncovered by fact-finding journalists, but if we are to believe the OLAF reports, many other useful things were built in Hungary at exorbitantly overpriced costs. However, we have had no more details about them so far because, according to the government, the investigation of these cases would seriously.

**How was the migration crisis perceived in your country, and do you think the EU had an appropriate political and legal response to the situation?**

The migration crisis of 2015 caught the EU completely unprepared. As a matter of fact, the community hardly had any real means to handle the situation; the existing protocols failed almost immediately, which unsurprisingly prompted member states to make decisions on their own. After some hesitation, Hungary sealed its southern border, while other countries chose other paths. The events of 2015 could hardly be called a success, but they at least kick-started a discourse on how to handle crises like this. When the Belarusian dictator recently tried to artificially create another migration crisis to put pressure on the EU, he failed, which shows that we did not commit the same mistake again, fortunately. On the whole, I still think we have a lot to do in the area of migration policy.

**Given the migration trends and population growth in Africa and the Middle East, do you believe there may be a substitution of the domicile population in Europe, and how has your country approached the issue of migration from those parts?**

Although there undoubtedly are some political actors who, for reasons beyond my comprehension, promote the highest possible

rate of immigration as an end in itself, this kind of irresponsible, self-serving and ideology-driven politics is not part of the mainstream anywhere in today's Europe, fortunately.

I believe that the dangers of illegal migration are clear for all sober political forces. Controlled and regulated migration is an entirely different issue, on which opinions obviously differ. It is understandable that Western European societies, where the concept of the nation is attached to citizenship and there is a centuries-long history of different cultures meeting each other, have a different approach than the Central European countries, where national identities are much more based on culture and have no historical precedents of large populations coming from other continents and settling in their territories.

As far as Hungary is concerned, the migration issue is one of the few areas where there's an almost complete national consensus. Personally, I also share this extremely cautious position, for two reasons. Firstly, Hungary is often unable to offer prospects even for its own inhabitants, unfortunately. I consider it a primary objective for Hungary to change that and become a country able to sustain its own inhabitants. Secondly, as a citizen of a country devastated by emigration, I can clearly see the threats posed by brain drain. If we simply bring the most innovative and resourceful citizens of developing countries over to Europe, how could we expect these countries to rise and grow just by relying on their own devices?

**In his book *Understanding Europe*, Christopher Dawson argued that as Europe became less Christian, its influence in international relations also declined. In your opinion, is Europe's Christian identity important for its political future, and should**

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**its place be regulated at the European level, as in, say, the Hungarian constitution?**

We, conservatives perhaps often tend to drown our concerns and anxiety in moralization. As a practising Roman Catholic, faith is of utmost importance for me, but I would rather separate it from the issues of power or political influence, because these things represent two completely different planes, in my opinion.

I believe that turning toward faith and the transcendent is something where you don't need to make any compromises, thank God. Instead, you can strive for perfection without giving regard to worldly considerations. That's why I find it difficult to grasp the issue of power and influence through the lens of faith. Does having a lot of power make me a better Christian? I don't see any correlation there.

In contrast, politics is not about perfection; it's far from it, actually. Instead, it's all about trying to find the best possible solution under different circumstances that are sometimes favourable and at other times quite the opposite, while using the opportunities arising from our influence. However, trying to act as the earthly representative of irrevocable divine truths is harmful both to yourself and the public good, in my opinion. It's harmful to the public good, because if you represent the absolute truth instead of only a position, you will be unable to reach the compromises so often needed in politics. It's also harmful to you, because the slightest professional or human error is immediately seen in a religious context, which damages people and faith alike. As a clear example, let me mention the Hungarian government party members, who use religion as a means to their political goals, but were caught up in drug and sex scandals. I think it is devastating for the reputation of Christianity in our society. Influence and power are not a matter of faith – it is a historical fact that atheists have been



able to climb quite high on the political ladder.

Of course, as a Christian I believe it's very important to have strong Christian communities and a strong Christian church in Europe and the world, too. However, I don't believe we should achieve that by writing everywhere some political slogans derived from Christianity, or using Christianity to justify some very worldly ambitions. If we have many politicians who do their best to follow the Christian teachings both in their attitudes and actions, the result will be closer to the perfection mentioned above. If we have too few of those politicians, our constitutions will remain no more than empty words, regardless of what we write in them.

**Did the Brussels administration have a good or bad response to the corona crisis, and how did your country position itself on this issue?**

They certainly managed it much better than the migration crisis in 2015. On a more serious note, considering that the European Union had to react to a radically new situation without practically any means, and harmonize the interests of 27 member states, I think they met the challenge. I'm not saying there's no room for substantial criticism or we can't find any faults, but on the whole they managed to coordinate vaccine acquisitions, adopt a €750 billion economic recovery package, while also making their best effort to convince member states to adopt a common vaccination certificate as well as to keep the internal borders open. They couldn't fully achieve these goals and before travelling, we still need to fill out as many forms and learn just as many quarantine regulations and restrictions as there are countries – well, that's the member states' fault and not the EU's. As a Hungarian, I must also mention how the Hungarian government pulled out of the common vaccine agreement and decided to vaccinate a significant share of the

population with the Chinese Sinopharm and the Russian Sputnik products. By this act, it managed to push hundreds of thousands of Hungarian citizens back to the “heyday” of the Iron Curtain, since their vaccination certificates are hardly accepted by any European country, so they can’t travel.

**What does Europe mean to you in the broadest context of the term?**

For me, Europe means the civilization that was created on the foundations of Greek philosophy, Roman law and Christian morality, from where it developed a unique critical attitude which forms the basis of our societal structure and which guarantees our freedom, since our political systems and democratic values are still firmly rooted in it to this day. That’s what connects the nations of this diverse continent and that’s what serves as an example for other nations in many parts of the world. Being a European is a value system and a world view for me.