

COMMENTARY: SIBIU SUMMIT

Our experts react to the Sibiu Summit 2019 (May)



Vladimír Bartovic | Afternoon tea instead of the groundbreaking summit

The Special Summit in Sibiu was first time mentioned in the State of the Union address of Commission's president Juncker in 2017. (His intention was to take the decisions needed for a more united, stronger and democratic Europe a day after Brexit was (supposedly) happening. Today, the United Kingdom is still a member state, it is uncertain that Brexit will ever happen, and the 27 leaders of EU member states are far from taking any decision about the Europe's future at all. Everybody is waiting for the European Parliament's elections results, with the composition of the institution will be main topic for their deliberations in the upcoming month.

Hence, instead of the groundbreaking summit taking important decisions about Europe's future, the leaders essentially met for an afternoon tea in a calm atmosphere of feigned unity. Juncker said that it was one of the easiest European Council meetings that he has ever attended. However, this atmosphere may change dramatically after the elections since the rifts between the leaders' opinion on the future of the Union are deeper than ever before.

Christian Kvorning Lassen | Empowering and Protecting Citizens – Focus on Citizens Rings Hollow in Vague Declaration

The Sibiu Summit had five core areas outlined in its agenda, amongst them 'Protecting and Empowering Citizens', which resulted in what can jokingly be termed "Ten Commandments", the majority of which emphasized improving the Union for Citizens. While the rhetoric is commendable, the results were underwhelming. Safeguarding the future for future generations rings hollow when climate change was reduced to a mere footnote. Helping the most vulnerable in Europe by putting people before politics is a vapid statement when the creation of a Common European Asylum System remains obstructed by especially the V4 countries. Investing in soft and hard power is non-committal, although there *is* poignancy in the wording that the EU will emphasize cooperation with international partners during a time where the US is doing its utmost to sow discord. However, citizens will have to wait until the 28th of May – and possibly wait longer due to what portends to be tumultuous EP elections – to see tangible initiatives rather than declarations with the word "citizens" liberally sprinkled all over.

Zuzana Stuchlíková | The future of the EU as a Strong Global Actor – Message to the World – We are still a Union

The Sibiu summit will not go down in history as a significant milestone it was designed to be three years ago. It did not re-launch the EU as a project of 27 member states or present new vision for future of the EU - major strategic decisions will be taken only after the European elections. Instead, the Sibiu Declaration focuses on basic principles – a dedication of European leaders to work together and look for joint solutions, declaration of a strong unity. It acknowledges challenges lying ahead and promises to build a Union able to cope with the most pressing challenges of the 21st century. That message is more important on a global scale than for domestic audiences – EU leaders reinstate the pledge to speak in one voice, work with partners and continue to support a rule-based international order. Trade and environmental challenges are singled out, underlining the principle of EU as a soft power. In light of many internal disputes, the Declaration sends a message – we are still a Union.

Louis Cox-Brusseau | Sibiu summit – Implications for Freedom, Justice and Security

This informal European Council saw the leaders of the EU27 come together to discuss the priorities of the next EU strategic agenda for the period 2019-2024. Observers who hoped for a strikingly clear and innovative message about the future of European security, defence and civil liberties will be disappointed; the summit only saw the adoption of the vague 'Sibiu Declaration' by the EU27, a ten-point statement indicating the intentions of the EU's next strategic agenda after the European Parliamentary elections in May 2019, without making much in the way of concrete indicative statements. The summit paid lip service to the notions of shared European defence, greater European integration and cooperation, upholding the rule of law and good democracy, without providing

clear indicators as to the EU's roadmap for delivering on such goals. Therefore, the Sibiu summit might be best characterised by 'business as usual' – with another European Council around the corner on 28 May, it is more likely that any significant developments will be announced then, in light of what promises to be a tumultuous set of elections for the Union.

Vít Havelka | Jobs, Growth and Competitiveness: Encouraging tones – May they be followed by concrete actions.

The Sibiu Summit was originally meant to kick off a new era of the European Union after the United Kingdom has left the community, however, due to British still being members of the Union, the significance of the Summit was severely diminished. Instead of a grand restart, a general declaration of ten future principles the Union should be based on in the future was released. Regarding the economic policies, the leaders stipulated they would base next steps on the principle of fairness – so that disparities between European citizens reduce. The global economy is undergoing a thorough and swift transformation incurred by digitalization and changes in global production chains. If Europe does not want to be left behind, it must move fast and in unity. The upcoming ten or fifteen years will be decisive for Europe to secure the current level of prosperity. It is therefore encouraging to see that the EU leaders are well aware of the challenges ahead and are willing to cooperate – although the intangible wording of the Summit remains a concern.

Kateřina Davidová | Sibiu vs. climate change: rift between progressives and delayers grows larger

Despite the Sibiu heads of states meeting being called "The Future of Europe" summit, the most challenging topic of our future, climate change, has been significantly downplayed. While some have hoped that the summit could prove to be an important milestone where the EU steps up its climate commitments, the result was a disappointment. In the final declaration, climate action only got a honourable mention at the very bottom of the list, and was framed not as an existential necessity, but as a way of enhancing Europe's global standing. Moreover, climate has proven to be a divisive topic among the member states. While France's Macron has urged to make climate a "key commitment" and got eight states to sign a paper calling for net zero emissions by 2050, Germany's Merkel has remained evasive and abstract. In order to be effective and prevent carbon leakage, however, climate targets need to be increased by all the member states, not just a few willing ones. It is expected that this will be a major topic of discussion at the next European Council in June.