

REPORT

The Roots of Euroscepticism throughout Europe (Jubel Festival)

Saturday 22nd of September 2018, 13:00 – 14:30
Leopold Park, Brussels

- **The panel was co-organized in collaboration with Think Visegrad - V4 Think Tank Platform and Jubel Festival, the European Democracy festival and took place on September 22, 2018 in Brussels. It featured Pavol Baboš (Assistant professor at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University), Leanda Barrington-Leach (Strategic Communications Coordinator at EEAS) and András Volom (Founder and President Sustainable Development Goals V4). Martin Michelot (Deputy Director of EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy) took on the moderation of the discussion.**

Euroscepticism seems to be defining current debates about the future of the European Union. The goal of this panel discussion was to address the issues regarding the origins of euroscepticism and how will the rise of Euroscepticism influence the 2019 European Parliament elections, with a specific focus on Central Europe. Discussing the ways to fight Euroscepticism was also on the agenda.

Introduced by moderator **Mr. Martin Michelot** (EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy), **Mr. Pavol Baboš** (Comenius University) opened the discussion by sharing with the audience his *perspective on euroscepticism from Slovakia*. He

stressed the *contradictions* of Slovak politicians who are in line with EU policy proposals when they are meeting in Brussels but blame the EU once they are coming home - for Mr. Baboš this attitude is present in several other European countries and nurture euroscepticism in the national public opinion. He then talked about Eastern European countries response to the migration crisis and the economic integration of the region within the European Union. Building on this first insight, Mr. Michelot suggested that increasing social protection and wages may be one of the ways to combat euroscepticism.

Next to take on the floor was **Ms. Leanda Barrington-Leach** (EEAS) who spoke about the link between euroscepticism and *EU foreign policy*. She found 5 recent internal and external developments that pushed the right-wing populism narrative in Europe: the financial and economic crisis; the migrant crisis with the increase of asylum applications in 2015; the series of terrorist attacks; the threat of Eastern power with Russia; and the disinformation and foreign interference. Ms. Barrington-Leach underlined the fact that those elements represent challenges to the European Union unity, but noted that eurosceptic parties are also confronted with this lack of unity when it comes to alliances and elections. She then listed several positive actions taken by the EU regarding external policy such as the sanctions against Russia or the European Defence Fund. She concluded by saying that she felt that there were more political awareness and willingness to combat euroscepticism.

At last, **Mr. András Volom** (Sustainable Development Goals V4) proposed a definition of the term euroscepticism based on his experience as an Hungarian citizen having lived in the United-Kingdom. To illustrate his intervention, Mr. Volom mentioned the latest Eurobarometer survey on public opinion about EU - where 3 out of 4 V-4 countries (Slovakia, Hungary and Poland) have around 75% of respondents who answered that they feel European. To this extend, he would talk about *euro-criticism*

instead of euroscepticism. Mr. Volom also talked about the *lack of connexion* between the Western Europe citizens and Eastern Europe citizens and *inequalities* as one of the main factors of euroscepticism using the example of the UK Brexit referendum where poorest regions voted to leave the EU.

A first question from the public gave Mr. Volom the opportunity to go back on the Eurobarometer survey and discuss the ambiguity and subjectivity of the term '*feeling European*' - Mr. Michelot and the panelists then followed up the discussion around the idea of an *European citizenship*. Speakers were then asked about the role of the EU institutions and the interplay between European and national/local politicians in the fight against euroscepticism.

Mr. Baboš confirmed that the national and local politicians have a very important role to play in shaping the discussions around Europe, especially with the upcoming European elections in 2019. A last remark from a participant raised the issue of the consequences of Brexit on other European countries who would be tempted to follow the same path.

To conclude, the panelists shared their views on the *5 scenarios of the Commission* on the Future of Europe: carrying on; nothing but the single market; those who want to do more do more; doing less more efficiently or doing much more together.