

European Sovereignty - Opportunities of a misunderstood Debate

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Does the debate on a "European sovereignty" raise expectations that are not realistic, as Peter Fischer-Bollin writes in his article of 27.12.2020 on ntv.de? No, in fact this term, which has meanwhile become a label for a discussion on the further development of the European Union, offers the opportunity for necessary political realities to emerge from a necessary debate.

This discussion was initiated by Emmanuel Macron in his speech at the Sorbonne on September 26, 2017, in which he summarised his European policy agenda thus:

"Europe alone can guarantee real sovereignty, that is, the ability to exist in today's world in order to defend our values and our interests. There is a task to build European sovereignty and there is a need to build it."

The French president considers European sovereignty necessary in areas such as foreign and defence policy, securing European borders, migration policy, and European fiscal policy.

Of course, in defence policy, for example, European sovereignty means that member states give up this competence in favour of Europe, as has already happened in trade policy and especially in monetary policy through the creation of a common currency. But would nations be abolished as a result, as Fischer-Bollin fears? Hardly, because the European Union is based precisely on the voluntary transfer of competences to the European level in areas in which an individual member state, even one of the larger countries in Europe such as France or Germany, can no longer perform its tasks alone. In Fischer-Bollin's view, external security is one of these areas, as he argues in his contribution for the EU member states to invest "in joint military capabilities and future technologies" and for joint defence policy action. But why not be consequent and build a real European defence policy and a European army - and thus, in the long run, achieve a much more efficient use of the funds that are currently spent on defence by almost every EU countries?

Why not let foreign policy be carried out by a European foreign minister and leave the French permanent seat on the UN Security Council to this European foreign minister and do without an independent national foreign policy, whose influence is rather limited than visible?

Those who see the end of the nation state conjured up by this must answer the question why this end did not already occur in 1999 with the abandonment of its own currency, since the German mark was an essential part of German sovereignty.

No, the EU is an organisation made up of nation states. And sovereign nation states are those that communitise competences in areas where nation-state action is not sensible or possible, and that reserve the right to act autonomously in all other areas. This shared sovereignty is the building principle of a federal Europe, a federal Europe, by the way, which every member state should be able to leave just as it is now possible in the EU. The fact that nationalist populists will stir up opposition to the transfer of sovereignty to the European level with the spectre of a European superstate cannot be prevented than can the largely mendacious campaign of the Brexiteers in Great Britain - but one can stand up to it and, above all, must not let it dictate one's own political actions.

Those who believe, especially in Germany, that the debate on European sovereignty initiated by France is nothing more than a stimulating activity for intellectuals, fail to recognise France's determination to implement a European policy strategy with the help of this debate. For Emmanuel Macron, the new European budget with the debt-financed Corona aid programme is, as he explained in his extensive interview in "Le Grand Continent", a "historic compromise" and a first step on the way to a European fiscal union.

This step was born out of necessity, but according to French conviction it fits into their own European policy strategy. In particular, it makes German economic resources available to Europe. And with other crises coming to Europe after Corona, as sure as eggs is eggs, Germany will not be able to oppose the claim of its economic resources for Europe in the future, despite all political and legal reservations, if it does not want to jeopardise European integration, German policy can only do what it already did when monetary union came into being: seize the opportunity offered by the debate on European sovereignty and play a decisive role in shaping the development of European sovereignty in the European interest, but also in its own interest. This includes the chance to challenge France in areas where it will presumably be more hesitant in renouncing national sovereignty, such as foreign and defence policy, than in the area of economic and financial policy.

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