
Why Boundaries and National Sovereignty Matter in a Border-less Europe

On October 11th, 2010, Professor **Stefan Auer**, a Jean Monnet Chair in EU European Studies at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia, kicked off this years *Open Lecture Series* under the MIREES Masters Program at the University of Bologna in Forli.

As the title of his lecture suggests, Prof. Auer focused on the question of **borders within the European Union**. He asserted that the reality of a border-less Union has yet to be achieved in the EU. The EU citizens must be attached to the European institutions as their primary source of sovereignty in order to achieve the kind of society in which the threat of **nationalism**, from the member-states, ceases. Yet following the Fifth Enlargement of the EU in 2004, nationalism is still dominant in the construction of identities in Europe. In order to highlight his claim, Prof. Auer provided the following three case studies: Slovak and Hungarian relations, the crisis of the Euro-Zone, and the expulsion of Roma from France. In each case there is a clear connection to the fact that political and social borders remain a reality.

In the case of Slovak – Hungarian relations, we have a case where on both sides, EU members since 2004, there has been a rise of populist politics and Ethnocentric political parties, and while states have been public about their own commitment to the European Union, the actions of the government have flown in the face of these statements. For example, in August 2009, Slovakia denied entry to Laszlo Solyom, who was attempting to enter Slovakia in his official capacity as President, unannounced, to visit the statue of St. Steven, which represents Hungarian Nationhood. Despite the Freedom of movement guaranteed all EU citizens, the European Commission determined that Slovakia had the right to deny the entry of the Hungarian head of state. Thus international law still governs relations between member states and concept of free movement only applies to private citizens. Once again we see that borders remain a reality, both enforced by the EU and on the social level.

The next case, the crisis of the Euro-Zone, highlights the failure of the EU to create real solidarity among the member-states. This has manifested itself in multiple way, most clearly the resistance of Germany, and the German people, to support the economic bailout for Greece and the prolonged political crisis in Belgium. But in addition to the lack of solidarity, what this crisis suggests is that while the enlargements have succeeded, the process of deepening has not.

In the final case explored by Professor Auer, the case of Roma expulsion, France locked itself in a conflict with the European Commission. In short, France initially rejected the European Commission as guardian of the Treaty of Rome saying that it along with the French people, was the guardian, thus claiming national sovereignty. Once the EC began to initiate infringement punishment, France changed its stance, suggesting this was about EU security and not about French security. But in any case, the expulsions of Roma continued, unpunished.

Prof. Auer's final conclusion was, evoking German political philosopher Carl Schmidt, that the EU is still in the process of defining its citizenship identities through the traditional process of nationalism, and Schmidt's *friend v. foe* paradigm. But along the way, the reality of partial disintegration of the Union should not be ignored or forcibly repressed. Following his discussion, students took advantage of question time to create a lively debate.

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