

Martin Haburaj:
Solidarity with Europe's troubled neighbours



For Europeans in the 21st century, “solidarity” should not be just another fancy expression. After many years of fights and disagreements, we have reached an unprecedented level of common understanding. We feel deep sympathy for each other within European Union. Yet we don't always do so well when we look across our borders. Currently, it is our eastern neighbor Ukraine which waits for us to stop being totally ignorant. This is a challenge European countries need to face particularly as an appropriate reaction to the conflict in Ukraine is also in our own interest.

The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation is indisputably a threat. It could also set a dangerous precedent for our future. We cannot afford to pretend that nothing has happened. If we let this incident slide by, we might pay the price in the form of sovereignty violation of some other country. Of that, our past holds many examples.

If we can agree a common reaction, it will be a signal for others to take our union seriously. To remain competitive and to defend our voice among countries such as the United States, China, India or indeed the Russian Federation, we simply can't afford to stay neutral or passive.

“The principal achievement of Europe is peace, which we often forget about as it has become so taken for granted by Europeans.”

Dominique de Villepin
Former Prime Minister of France

Even worse than staying neutral would be to become divided. When the European Union decided to support Ukraine and react to the Russian aggression by imposing sanctions, some of the member states felt they were suffering more than others. Nevertheless, staying together

is essential. Acting on our own could end up being much more costly.

Solidarity with Europe's troubled neighbors also means solidarity with European citizens living on our borders and in very close neighborhood of the conflict. We should be sympathetic towards these frightened gatekeepers. They are the ones who will have to face the consequences of any unsolved or unfrozen problem first.

At our Young Professionals Seminar, I learnt a lesson about solidarity: it cannot be taken for granted. However, Ukraine is an example of the troubled neighbor where we should not hesitate. None of the steps we took will hurt anybody (except for some economically damage to ourselves). But at the end of the day they offer the best chance of helping both out neighbor and ourselves.