



Honorary Professor Dieter MAHNCKE: “What’s wrong with the EU?”

On 27 October 2016 the Rector of the College of Europe, Prof. Dr. Dr. Jörg Monar, officially conferred the title of Honorary Professor to Prof. Dr. Dieter Mahncke for forty years of teaching in several study programmes. Professor Mahncke was not only Visiting Professor at the College but also Director of Studies of the Department of European Political and Administrative Studies and founding Director of the Department of EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies. The latter programme celebrated its first ten years of existence on the same day.

Professor Mahncke delivered his valedictory lecture on the topic “What’s wrong with the EU?”. He argued that the European Union is currently undergoing multiple crises, including an economic crisis, a crisis related to refugee/migrant flows, the Brexit shock and the surge of nationalism. The phenomenon of Euroscepticism can be partially understood by the feeling that many people have of being left behind, by their opposition to globalization, but also by anti-Americanism, as well as by the repudiation of the political elites and institutions both at home and at the supranational level. Political parties that openly fuel these sentiments are currently attracting more support in many member states. As the EU is not managing these critical issues effectively, it has to undergo further reforms, since most of the challenges Europe is facing can best be tackled by working together.

Professor Mahncke went on to set out his ideas to deal with what some countries feel is a lack of national influence and visibility. He inter alia suggested that more efforts are put into exploring the strengthening of national parliaments – without hampering the policy-making process at EU level. In this respect, the definition and clear delimitation of EU competences is of the utmost importance. In his opinion, the EU should strictly abide by the rule of law and by the principle of subsidiarity. All member states and companies, big or small, should be treated in the same way. In addition to that, the EU is in dire need of opening a frank discussion about its functioning and future, leaving aside political correctness. Given the concern many citizens have with the integration of migrants and refugees, as well as the supposed loss of national identity and the weak economic performance of their countries, such a frank discussion is all the more necessary.

In his concluding remarks, Professor Mahncke underlined that it was pointless to pretend that this was “just another crisis” from which the EU will emerge stronger. The two threats that the EU is facing, one related to what it stands for and the other related to the EU as a project, require an immediate debate. This debate should seek to answer four questions: “why do we need the EU?”, “what shape should the EU take?”, “what can we expect the EU to develop?” and “what does it take for the EU to deliver its objectives?”.