Habermas, J., 2012, *The Crisis of the European Union. A Response* (Original title: *Zur Verfassung Europas*; trans. from German C. Cronin), Polity Press, Cambridge--Malden, pp. XII + 140.

In the preface to his earlier book on Europe (*Europe the Faltering Project*, translation form German: Ciaran Cronin; Polity Press, 2009; German original: *Ach, Europa*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 2008), Jürgen Habermas made the following remark (p. VII): "The course of European unification has been determined until now by the governments. But they now seem to be at their wits' end. Perhaps it is time for them to hand over responsibility for the future destiny of Europe to their peoples." His present volume (containing two academic articles, one interview and two newspaper articles) can be rightly interpreted as an engaging elaboration upon the thought he had formulated four years earlier (the quoted preface was written in 2007). The author's intentions are stated in the introductory remarks and can be interpreted as two general aims. The first is as an attempt at the conceptualization of the idea of transnational democracy (the theoretical aim). The second, is an attempt at removing the intellectual obstacles hindering its enactment (the practical aim).

As Habermas himself states, in the face of the globalization compounded with the recent economic crisis, "[t]he international community of states must develop into a cosmopolitan community of states and world citizens." Why is this necessary? In the author's words "[t]he increase in power of the international organizations actually undermines the democratic procedures in nation states to the extent that national functions shift to the level of transnational governance." What is crucial here, of course, is the fact that the power (or competences) are being transferred to the transnational level, but they are not being followed by the democratic procedures. In other words, powerless democracy remains at the national level. The logical conclusion is irresistible: if the influence of civil society (through inclusion and deliberation) on the social reality is to be preserved, then democracy must be made supranational.

In the European Union this task is all the more pressing, because the methods of the "executive federalism" applied as a response to the crisis, pose an exceptional threat to the legitimization of the

European project: they are undemocratic; they violate the sovereignty of national parliaments; they are fiercely contested.

As national states are powerless vis-à-vis the globalization and full fledged pan-European federation is a practical impossibility, it is necessary to reform the EU. In order to make it supranational and democratic at the same time, it must be based upon two pillars: citizens of the EU and peoples of the member states. It is important to understand here the function of the sovereign: on both levels, Habermas argues, it is the same subject, however performing different functions or having different perspectives (the theoretical considerations of Claudio Franzius and Armin von Bogdandy cited by Habermas are very helpful in clarifying this point; cautiously – taking into account the reservations formulated by the author – it could be compared to the sovereign's double function in the federal systems). Hence in the proposed institutional architecture, nation states are not irrelevant – together with empowered citizens of the EU they will perform a co-legislating role, so their influence will be upheld, albeit that it will be somewhat limited. For obvious reasons, this proposition of the EU's renewal is closely related with the reform of its institutional framework, and thus shall contribute to the decisive strengthening of its (currently not inexistent, alas unsatisfactory) democratic legitimization. It should also entail the establishment of the genuine EU-wide public sphere, where the concept of the European civic solidarity could be formulated and perfected (in order to later influence the shaping of the EU policies).

In Habermas' opinion, the above briefly discussed model should be considered as a potential inspiration not only for the reform of the EU, but also for the reform of the United Nations (i.e. global or universal attempt at the establishment of the transnational democracy, with the concept of human dignity and human rights at its ethical and legal core).

During the July-August 2014 conflict in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli historian and writer Fania Oz-Salzberger has called her government to send medical supplies to Gaza, thus signaling that it was fighting not the civilian population but the forces threatening Israel's security. She concluded her appeal with the following paragraph:

> This goes against the rules and norms of war, I know. Being a historian of ideas, not a specialist in military history, I do not know

> whether it has a precedent in the annals of armed conflict. Be it as it may, we Israelis, at our best, are rather adept at breaking the rules. Since when have we been afraid of thinking out of the box? Why not create a new model of mid-war humanity for other combatants to emulate? World peace is a long way away. Let us begin changing the awful reality of war one step at a time. (source of the quote: <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/118791/israel-should-immediately-send-medical-supplies-gaza>).

Of course, the intention of the present reviewer is not to compare the realities of war with the problems faced by the European Union (however serious they are; e.g. Habermas' descriptions of the dangers posed by the unregulated financial market are quite illustrative). Such a comparison would be inappropriate, to say the least. At the same time however, this quotation contains an enormous belief in – and an incentive for – the unorthodox, creative and farsighted thinking, even during the most difficult of circumstances.

In the light of the above it must be acknowledged that Habermas' book performs a similar function: it is a call for realistic but courageous thinking about the EU's future, notwithstanding the prevailing pessimist mood. In his own words, the challenges of the contemporary world force us "[t]o think and act realistically [but] without betraying the utopian impulse" (hence the concept of the realistic utopia). At the same time it offers a set of clear indications ("constructive proposals") suggesting a direction (or a set of starting points) of such a thinking.

The present reviewer has no doubts whatsoever, that Habermas' serious and intellectually stimulating response to the crisis of the EU deserves to be widely read and discussed. It indeed constitutes an inspiring perspective, which is much "[m]ore needful than that offered by mainstream advice and the petty manoeuvring of politics as usual."

Sergiusz Bober
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow
Institute of Political Science