

## A BALANCE SHEET OF THE FRENCH G-8/G-20 PRESIDENCY

*Presentation of His Excellency René Roudaut, Ambassador of the Republic of France<sup>1</sup>*

ANNA GYÓRY

René Roudaut, Ambassador of the French Republic accredited to Budapest held a presentation on the current state of the French G20/G8 Presidency, its achievements so far, and its further aims and goals.

“*God is dead, Marx is dead, and I'm not feeling that good myself.*” he started his speech with a quote from Woody Allen reflecting on the current challenges and tasks facing the French Presidency of the G8 and the G20.

The G8 was founded in 1975 under the French President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing who invited the heads of governments from West Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States to a summit in Château de Rambouillet. The six leaders have established the G6, which was joined by Canada the next year. The 8th member of the G8 is Russia, formally joined the group in 1997. The European Union is represented by the President of the European Commission and the leader of the country that holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The G20 is a group of finance ministers and central bank governors from 20 major economies<sup>2</sup>: 19 countries plus the European Union. The G-20 economies comprise 85% of global gross national product, 80% of world trade<sup>3</sup>. The Group of Twenty first met in Berlin, 1999 to discuss questions related to energy, sustainable development and demographic problems. Since 2008 the highest level of the forum is the meeting of the head of states.

The most important characteristics of the function of the G20 is that without any binding obligations, its only strengths are scrutiny and peer pressure yet the common decisions made result in a successful cooperation. Despite having no formal legitimacy the Ambassador entitled it as the most important economic-financial forum as opposed to the value-based UN. The Ambassador entitled the UN as the “G192” and criticised it, as it is not the right forum to tackle international problems due to its size and insufficiently functioning voting system.

Could the G-20 replace the UN? What is the legitimacy of the G20? – The questions arose. According to M. Roudaut, the G-20 is a better functioning forum, as it is smaller, less formal and in many occasions more efficient than the UN which lost part of its credibility (due to the slow reactions and bad decisions of the Security Council and the General Assembly). In his view, without criticising the UN, the G20 could be a more adequate forum to tackle some problems, as it is more focussed and is more able to put forward certain decisions.

Nevertheless, what is the legitimacy of the G20? More than two-thirds of the world's population lives in the G20 countries, so even if there is no international authority as in the UN, there is a real *raison d'être* for the G20 and its decisions.

As he put it, the G20 is an „open club”, where the countries concerned by the questions on the agenda are always invited; however the African States and Norway, as one of the biggest contributors of the UN, but not a member of the G20, should have a larger space in the organisation. Answering a question on the legitimacy of the UN, he has expressed that he never doubted it, but there is a need for certain changes and measures, however the reform of the UN is not very likely, so he called for considering and searching for alternative solutions.

---

<sup>1</sup> The entire presentation is available online at: [www.hiia.hu](http://www.hiia.hu)

<sup>2</sup> Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi-Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, UK, USA, EU.

<sup>3</sup> Including intra-EU trade.

After a brief historic introduction, he described the functioning of the G20, the framework and the aims of the French presidency, which we have to view as a whole in a financial and economic context. The French presidency has six major priorities:

1. Reforming the International Monetary System (IMS),
2. Strengthening financial regulation,
3. Combating commodity price volatility,
4. Supporting employment and strengthening the social dimension of globalization,
5. Fighting corruption, and
6. Working on behalf of development.

According to M. Roudaut, global problems require an international answer, thus the strengthening of the cooperation between the G8, the G20 and the EU is also very important. In order to solve one of the greatest problems: the global economic and fiscal imbalances, as the deficit of the US and the tensions inside the Euro zone.

Whereas the G20 is the adequate forum to tackle economic problems and questions, the G8 is a strategic and political answer to challenges such as nuclear safety, international peace and security, and drug trafficking as well as the regulation of the internet, as a future challenge. The internet should not be restricted but defined by best practices which should be laid down on an international level, such as the restriction of racists, hate-speech and criminal content homepages.

Besides the above mentioned, France would like to pay a particular attention to the strengthening of the African Partnership, the “peace and security package”, which includes the elimination of transatlantic drug trafficking, terrorism, nuclear proliferation and the combat against the destabilisation of states.

Referring to the overcoming of the current economic crisis, he said that the global economic situation cannot be indifferent to Europe, as the global imbalances also influence the situation of the EU as well, and we cannot choose a solution with which even one country is losing. Europe is an economic giant but a political dwarf, he said, emphasising that the Membership in the EU cannot be based only on interest, it is also an ideal, it is not only an internal market, we should not underestimate the political importance of the union and the „divine dimension of construction of Europe”, thus measuring the value of membership solely in the view of national interest is selfish.

In his sum up he underlined that the picture he draw of the situation might be pessimistic; we have to know that everything is not under control, and as members of the international community we have to work on it.

Answering questions, he said that the reform of the UN is a French priority as well and dialogue and cooperation among the different international organisations such as the UN, the G8, G20 is important, the institutionalisation of the UN-G20 dialogue is on the agenda of the Mexican presidency of the G20. The ideal long-term solution would be the reform of the out-dated UN Charter.

In his opinion, the stability and the future of the Euro zone is at stake, the way out from the current crisis is the deepening of the union, the construction of a federal Europe, with which the power and influence of Europe would be increased. As the budget of the EU is now less than 1% of the GDP of the EU, it cannot function as a real government. The deepening of the integration also calls for the diminishing of differences in Europe, this is the main aim of the French – German Competitiveness Pact as well. Hungary’s abstention from the Pact, despite the current economic state of the country, has caused some disappointment. For the question, if there are too many formations of Gs and whether the world is leader-less at the moment, he answered yes, and it is important that the European Union and European governance gains more space and reputation. The Lisbon Treaty has not solved our problem in the union - it is still an incomprehensible organisation piling up on national policies and international government. The real challenge for Europe is to reshuffle the institutions to create a real federal Europe. So we can pose the question: What would Jean Monnet do?

\*

see@[southeast-europe.org](http://southeast-europe.org)  
[www.southeast-europe.org](http://www.southeast-europe.org)

© DKE 2011.