

Chapter Three

The Future of the EU in Jean-Claude Juncker's State of the Union Speeches

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Abstract

The 2014–19 European Parliament legislature faced a number of crises which threatened the future of the European project. The discontent within the European Union was evident in the 2014 European Parliament Elections, which saw the rise in popularity of various Eurosceptic parties across Europe. The aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and the migration crisis challenged the dynamics within the European Union, while politicians across the region struggled to propose long-term solutions. In 2016, the European Union faced another threat following the Brexit referendum, which saw the majority of the British citizens voting to leave the European Union. All these challenges were reflected in the discourse used by the President of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. As President of the European Commission, he had to give the State of the Union speeches between 2015 and 2018 where he sought to provide a vision for the future of the EU.

The State of the Union addresses, delivered by the Presidents of the European Commission, have been used as tools to bring the European Union (EU) closer to its citizens and to strengthen the collaboration between the European Parliament (EP) and Commission. Whilst not as popular as their U.S. counterparts, these speeches are still met with high expectations and criticism due to the fact that they project the potential future trajectory of the European Union. This is the reason why this article evaluates the State of the Union speeches given by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. It attempts to understand how the Commission's plans on the future of the EU evolved between 2015 and 2018.

Introduction

“On 25 May the voters of Europe spoke to us. They sent us powerful, if sometimes contradictory, messages. Today, and in the years to come, we have to respond” (Juncker, 2014, p. 16).

Juncker's first statement as a candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission reflected the turmoil which the EU was experiencing. On the 25 of May 2014, European voters sent a dire warning to the EU. With a historical low turnout of 42.61% and far-right and eurosceptic parties across Europe dominating the elections, there was a need to reform the ailing European project. This address highlights an awareness of this wave of discontent. For the first time, the President of the European Commission had to reflect the popular vote of the 2014 EP Elections, with Jean-Claude Juncker being proposed as the compromise Spitzenkandidat of the European People's Party (EPP), the largest group within the European Parliament.

The relatively short speech dealt with a variety of issues including the EP elections, the detachment which existed between the EU and its citizens, the financial crisis, and European Security. There was one element which linked these topics together, that is, the need to move forward with the European Project. Juncker called for the institutions and citizens to embrace a 'new start for Europe'. However, this new start would eventually be halted by a series of setbacks including the Syrian Civil War, the ensuing migration crisis, and the Brexit referendum.

The scope of this chapter is to use critical discourse analysis (CDA) to evaluate the State of the Union speeches made by Juncker as President of the European Commission from 2015 to 2018. This study will outline the way Juncker's vision on the future of Europe developed from one address to another, and the impact which political developments had on this vision. This chapter is thus divided into four main sections. The first provides a brief evaluation of the history of the State of the Union speeches. The second focuses on the theoretical framework based on Fairclough & Fairclough's (2013) analysis of critical discourse, while the third provides a brief overview of Juncker's State of the Union addresses. The final section consists of a detailed analysis of how Juncker's vision on the future of the EU developed throughout his term as President of the European Commission, and the impact of political developments on this vision.

The European Commission and the State of the Union Address

The State of the Union address by the President of the Commission was formally established by the Treaty of Lisbon and became part of the 2010 framework agreement which shapes the relationship between the EP and European Commission (Pansardi & Battagazzorre, 2018). This address is traditionally held in September with the President of the Commission reflecting on the past and present while highlighting future priorities. The main elements of the Commission's programme and, therefore, its priorities, are sent to the EP in advance. The purpose of the State of the Union speech was to provide more clarity of the Commission's agenda, to bring it closer to the citizens, and to enhance the cooperation between the EP and the Commission. However, it never reached the status that European technocrats expected. Ryan Heath (2017) branded this address as "the U.S. President's speech without the vision. It's the

Queen's speech without the Queen". There are a number of reasons for this including the fact that the President of the Commission is not the President of the EU and must share power with the heads of the European Council, Parliament and Central Bank (Heath 2017). Yet, the State of the Union still has a function. Whilst there are only few studies on the State of the Union addresses, they are still scrutinised by national governments and the media.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The study of political discourse received widespread attention in the last few decades since political scientists are increasingly using language to evaluate political behaviour. Fairclough & Fairclough (2013) define discourse as the "use of language in a social context" (p. 81), which represents various aspects that characterise the socio-politico fields (Trimithiotis, 2018). Discourse analysis relies on the premise that assumptions, ideas and judgements can provide researchers with the basic terms for discussions on a particular concept or event (Glynos, Howarth, Norval, Speed, 2009). From a political science angle, politicians use language to communicate with their audience through interviews, reports, debates and speeches (Fairclough, 2013). The language used not only reflect their values, strategies and goals but also the choices they are required to make as part of the decision-making process (Fairclough, 2008; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013).

In the 1980s, Norman Fairclough provided a new analytical framework to evaluate discourse. This analytical tool was chosen due to its characteristics:

"CDA brings the critical tradition in social analysis into language studies, and contributes to critical social analysis a particular focus on discourse, and on relations between discourse and other social elements (power, ideologies, institutions, social identities etc.). Critical social analysis is normative and explanatory critique. It is normative critique: it does not simply describe existing realities but also evaluates them, assesses the extent to which they match up to values that are taken (contentiously) to be fundamental for just or decent societies (e.g., certain requisites for human well-being). It is explanatory critique: it does not simply describe and evaluate existing realities but seeks to explain them" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 178).

The focus of this definition relies on three main elements which are: social contexts (situations), knowledge (institutions), and social identities (social structures) (Howarth, & Griggs, 2016). Critical discourse analysts focus on the interpretation of the language used, context (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000) and the way power and ideologies shape this discourse (Wodak, 1999). Isabela and Norman Fairclough's (2013) theory is grounded in the idea that politics is based on decisions taken by individuals. These decisions are not only based on ideologies but are also influenced

by the institutions and social structures. Discourse is the tool which such politicians use to legitimise arguments and decisions while seeking to persuade others to take a similar stance (Howarth, & Griggs, 2016).

Isabela and Norman Fairclough (2013) hold that the power of speech is extremely important for political communication. Politicians and agents use the power of speech to influence their audience on the benefits and harms of particular policies and to defend their decisions. Within such a framework, politicians use three genres of rhetoric developed by Aristotle which are; deliberative, forensic, and epideictic depending on their objectives and audience. Deliberative rhetoric is discourse based on the future with politicians trying to influence their audience to take a particular course of action; forensic rhetoric is often used to defend or condemn the action of others whilst epideictic rhetoric is used in political campaigns to attack others (Lawson-Tancred, 1991).

Whilst rhetoric is important, it may not be sufficient to influence audiences since several questions linked with speech delivery arise. These include the kind of speech that politicians opt for and the way that politicians try to convince their audience that their approach is the most suitable one. In order to be successful, politicians are required to use arguments to validate their claims (Hambermas, 1984; Johnson, 1991). These arguments have been summarised in Table 1 adapted from Fairclough & Fairclough (2013) outlining a theoretical framework based on critical discourse analysis, which is subsequently used in the third and fourth sections to assess Juncker’s speeches.

TABLE 1: ELEMENTS WHICH SHAPE DISCOURSE	
Claim	Politicians provide a course of action and the rationale behind it
Circumstantial premises	Politicians are required to explain their agenda and what is influencing it.
Goal premises	Politicians have to outline their main goals.
Value premises	Politicians have to explain how their goals are based on particular values or the values of their parties.
Means-goal premises	Politicians are required to outline what might be achieved if a particular course of action is followed
Addressing alternative options	Politicians discuss alternative options and explain why their choices are the best ones for their audience.
Adapted from Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013	

The decision to choose this framework was taken because public discourse is based on six elements (cf. Table 1) outlined by Fairclough & Fairclough (2013), involving politicians using evidence to justify their claims. This justification is required for

them to explain why they are proposing particular objectives, to link these goals with their values and principles, explain the way they will reach their goals, highlight the negative consequences of not achieving these goals, and persuade voters that the alternative goals provided by others are not suitable for them. In fact, the only element which was not used in the fourth section is the alternative options element – as in his speeches, Juncker often failed to tackle any other ideas which could have been adopted to strengthen the EU.

Political discourse is often dependant on practical reasoning, which is used by politicians to defend particular choices and highlight the rationale behind them. At every step of the way, politicians are required to deliberate and provide information on proposed choices. (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013). This may contribute towards building an effective argument.

However, political scientists are aware of the limitations of deliberation. Whilst deliberation is desired, elections are not always decided on information provided to voters. Politicians or agents can resort to manipulation to achieve their objectives. They have the ability to provide alternative facts and to distort their competitors' message to achieve their goals. Phenomena such as populism, together with other extraneous forces, also have the ability to shape and distort the information sent to voters. All these elements have contributed to the rise of post-truth politics or alternative facts systems which politicians, agents, the media and institutions like the European Union are struggling to contain. This is leading to further destabilisation of political systems across the globe and might produce unexpected electoral results (Ball, 2017). Last but not least, voters simply vote according to their allegiance and not on the policies or discourse they are being presented with (Caplan, 2011).

While the influence of discourse has its limitations, it remains a powerful tool in the hands of politicians, agents and others, which can be used to promote their worldview, goals and ideas. Fairclough & Fairclough (2013) outlined how “discourses as a way of representing the world do not describe what social reality is but also what it should be” (p. 103). This can be seen in the state of the union speeches of the Presidents of the Commission. As this chapter argues, Juncker had to address the challenges being faced by the EU and its member states, whilst at the same time provide a series of objectives developed by his Commission on how to safeguard the future of the European Union.

Critical Discourse Analysis through NVIVO

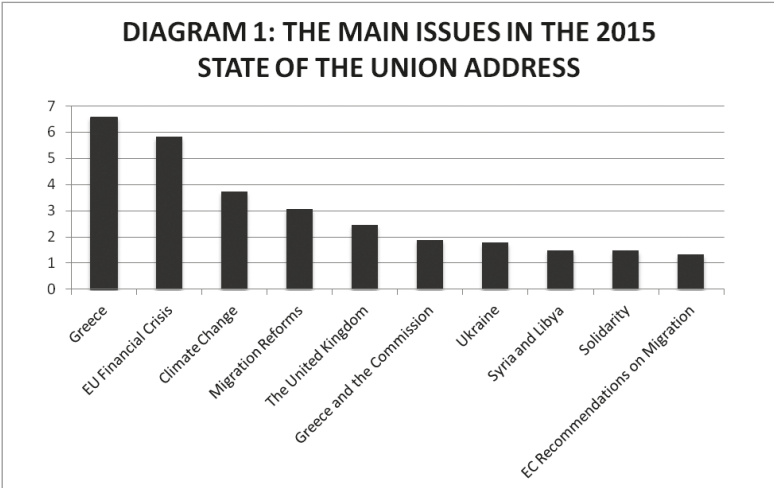
In order to evaluate the State of the Union address through Fairclough & Fairclough's (2013) theoretical framework, this study uses NVIVO to codify these speeches. The speeches were uploaded on NVIVO and a number of nodes based on the discourse used were established to categorise the various subjects dealt with. Over 23 Nodes were established with one of the main nodes being the future of Europe. As these speeches were being analysed and coded, the decision was taken to use a number

of aggregate nodes. More than 28 aggregate nodes were created under the future of the Europe node to highlight the various issues which were being discussed on the future of the EU. The State of the Union speeches were also coded according to the issues tackled. When the coding was completed and all four speeches were evaluated, a hierarchy chart was generated through NVIVO for every speech. In the case of the first speech, since the future of the EU was not the main theme, two hierarchy charts were developed: one which looks at the top issues discussed in the speeches, and the other which looks at the future of the EU (parent node) and its aggregate nodes to evaluate how it was tackled and the language used by Juncker.

State of the Union 2015: The Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity: 9 September 2015

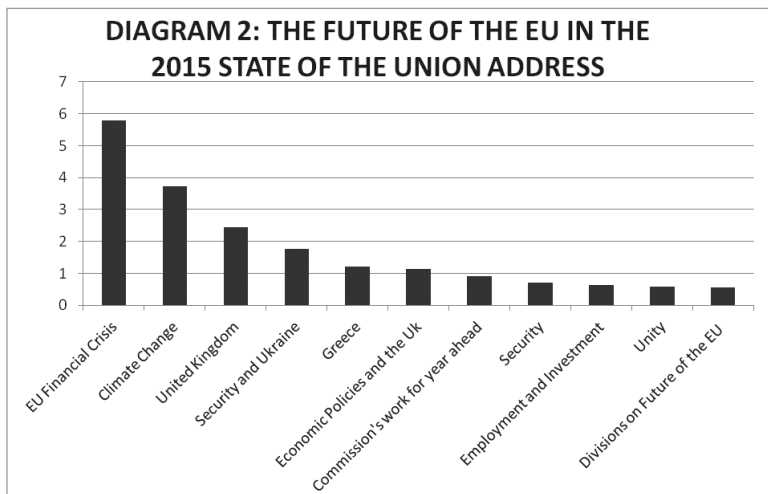
“It is time to speak frankly about the big issues facing the European Union. Because our European Union is not in a good state” (Juncker, 2015, p. 2).

Juncker’s first speech as President called for “honesty, unity and solidarity.” The themes explored in his speech reflect the challenges the EU faced during that year. The Greek financial crisis was still ongoing, and finding a long-term solution proved challenging. The Syrian migration crisis was threatening to tear down an already-weakened Union. A referendum on whether the UK should remain within the EU loomed on the horizon. Prime Minister David Cameron had pledged a referendum during an electoral campaign, and talks were underway to renegotiate Britain’s position within the EU. The possibility to leave the EU rose following the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and the inclusion of Article 50 which allows states to formally withdraw from the Union.



The issues (cf. Diagram 1) tackled by Juncker include the financial crisis (Greece, the EU Financial Crisis, and Greece and the European Commission), Climate Change, Migration (Migration Reforms, Syria and Libya, Solidarity and the EC Recommendations on Migration), the United Kingdom and the Conflict in Ukraine. The first speech is more oriented toward the present challenges rather than the future of the EU.

Diagram 2 reveals how this speech was used to tackle the immediate problems being faced by the EU. The main claim in this speech is that further reforms are required to strengthen the EU. Juncker's vision for a modern EU required a series of reforms. These reforms were meant to help the EU overcome its challenges and transform it in fields such as security where it lacked the required consensus to develop further.



To safeguard the EU and strengthen its foundations, Juncker outlined how the European supranational institutions needed to tackle issues such as Climate Change, the status of the United Kingdom, and security in Europe. In each of these areas, there is an evident frustration regarding the constant failure of the EU and its member states to reach consensus since national interests superseded the European ones.

This speech is especially important since Juncker (2015) provides the goal and circumstantial premises of his Commission especially with regards to the financial crisis. One of the first priorities and the main goal premise was to try and solve the financial crisis which plagued Europe. On this matter, the circumstantial premise is based on five domains which the Commission said it was going to focus on to tackle the effects of the financial crisis. These included: (1) a Common Deposit System Guarantee to protect the savings of the European citizens for up to €100,000, (2) a stronger role for the Euro, (3) more efficient economic and fiscal surveillance, (4) the establishment of a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base to fight tax avoidance,

and (5) the creation of a Euro-Treasury area which would take responsibility during periods of economic shock.

In this speech, the future of the European Union is also linked with the development of a Digital Single Market. Juncker highlights a series of goals to secure this future. He argues that the European project could move forward with further investment, stronger copyright rules and the finalisation of the Transatlantic Trade agreement with the United States. Reference is also made to the removal of roaming charges in 2017 and its ensuing benefits for European citizens. The President of the European Commission acknowledged the difficulty and lack of consensus which the EU institutions faced in finding long-term solutions to the financial crisis. Much of the reforms required the consent of both the EP and EU Council, and there was enough discontent and disagreement especially on the Common Deposit System Guarantee:

“I am of course fully aware there is no consensus on this yet. But I also know that many of you are as convinced as I am of the need to move ahead. I say to those who are more sceptical: the Commission is fully aware that there are differences in the starting positions of Member States” (Juncker, 2015, p. 9).

Disagreement amongst the member states was not limited to the Greek financial crisis. On this matter, Juncker’s speeches provide an insight on the intergovernmental tensions within the EU. In fact, Juncker highlights the disappointment for the failure in finding a long-term solution for the Greek crisis. He argues that “our collective inability to provide a swift and clear answer to the Greek crisis over the last months weakened us all” (Juncker, 2015, p. 8). Juncker is especially critical of the EP and its failure to give timely approval for the €35 billion package that the Commission (and the Council) proposed to promote economic growth in Greece. However, here “the means goal premise” is not clear as the EU Commission President fails to explain how this package could help Greece at a time when the EU was imposing further austerity measures.

Whilst only 1% of the speech concerns the UK, Juncker takes the opportunity to defend its role within the EU; a role which would only be guaranteed if a trade agreement is reached and the British citizens vote to remain in the Union. The discourse is positive and augurs for a future agreement. However, Juncker fails to take into account the circumstantial premises which pushed David Cameron to call for a referendum in the first place. He acknowledges that this new challenge was not simply a problem within the UK but a consequence of the failure of the EU to adapt to the modern world:

“We all agree that the EU must adapt and change in view of the major challenges and crisis we are facing at the moment” (Juncker, 2015, p. 10).

This statement is particularly interesting because Juncker uses the third-person “we”. A question arises: was he referring collectively to EU institutions? Taking into account the complex decision-making process in the EU, one may deduce that he is arguing for collective responsibility amongst EU institutions and member-states. To appeal to every institution and member state and strengthen his Commission’s course of action, Juncker explains the value premise behind his proposals. In this case, the values consisted of the EU four freedoms which had to be safeguarded and strengthened as they would help the EU in the challenges it was facing. In addition, further economic and political reforms were required to bolster the role of the EU within the international system. Whilst for a number of decades the EU has tried to adopt a larger security role, the various disagreements amongst the member-states and the role of NATO in Europe, hindered these plans. With a new President of the Commission, security reforms were again going to be a priority.

Yet, European officials struggled to persuade member-states on the need to transform the EU into a security player. Juncker’s claim was that the world was not at peace, and that the EU had the responsibility to act to restore peace by taking an active role in stabilising Ukraine. He thus links the future of the EU with the need to secure Ukraine and protect its citizens. His rationale was that Russia was not only a threat to the Ukraine, but also to Europe. This required a united front on economic sanctions despite their unpopularity among member-states.

The subject concerning ‘unity’ within the EU was also used in the discourse to promote climate change initiatives gaining 4% of coverage. Juncker warned that climate change had the potential to be a security issue due to the depletion of natural resources which is why more action was required from the EU. He highlighted the importance of the Paris Agreement together with the other reforms implemented by the EU, including the reduction of emissions by at least 40% by 2030. These reforms were certainly aimed towards developing the EU as a leader in Sustainable Development through the promotion of renewable energy initiatives to increase employment in Europe.

Juncker’s first speech received mixed reviews from the press. Whilst the media praised Juncker’s commitments in addressing the EU’s challenges and the initiatives promoting sustainable development and renewable energy, the perception was that he was not aware of the realities being faced by EU citizens.

Juncker failed to propose concrete solutions or alternatives to the Syrian migration crisis. The speech was delivered a few months after the body of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old boy, was found on a Turkish beach. Pictures of his corpse spread globally generating widespread indignation and criticism against the EU and border states for not doing enough to save lives. Concrete recommendations were also expected for the Greek financial crisis which was still creating pressures in Greece due to high rates of unemployment (Morgan, 2018). In addition, as Juncker declared, ‘unity’ was required to move on with the European project. However, finding ‘Unity’ on issues of which member-states had divergent views was no easy task.

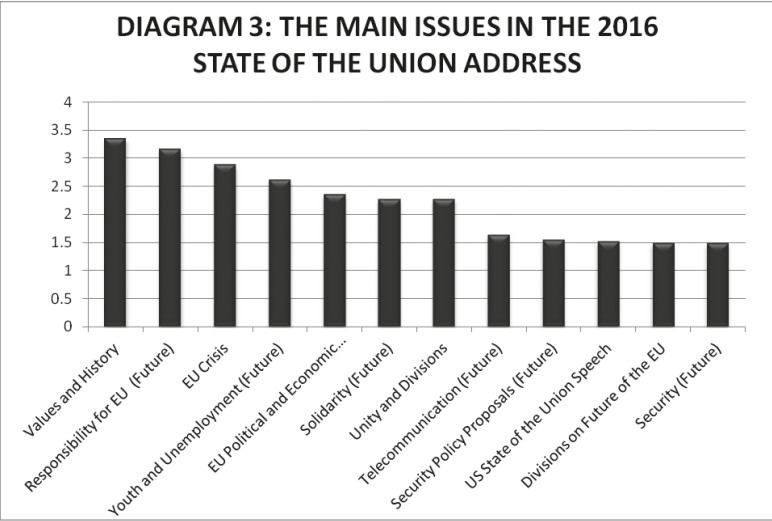
State of the Union 2016: Towards a better Europe – a Europe that protects, empowers and defends: 14 September 2016

The next twelve months are the crucial time to deliver a better Europe: a Europe that protects; a Europe that preserves the European way of life (Juncker, 2016, p. 2).

A year after Juncker was chosen to head the European Commission, the EU still faced challenges arising from the financial crisis, high unemployment and migration from the war-torn Near East. Yet, 2016 was also the year when the BREXIT referendum took place and 51.89% of the British electorate voted to leave the EU. While this news dominated the European political scene, there is little reference to it in this address. Article 50 was due to be triggered in March 2017, and the European institutions were still digesting this result and its implications.

In this speech Juncker defends the policies implemented by the Commission with an agenda based on the future (cf. Diagram 3) rather than the present. At the same time, as the title suggests, Juncker made a second attempt to prioritise security. With regards to promoting security reforms, and using critical discourse analysis, Juncker employed the value premise by linking these reforms to “EU values and principles” declaring that, as a security player, the EU would strengthen and safeguard its values.

EU values take centre-stage and Juncker reminds his audience that Europeans fought hard for such values and, therefore, they are worth preserving. He said that he had the impression: “that many seem to have forgotten what being European means.” (Juncker, 2016, p. 3). Whilst a number of European officials warned that the EU was being taken for granted, the EU failed to convince its citizens of the importance of its values and principles. Juncker therefore, proceeded to highlight how the EU led to tangible improvements.



In a similar vein to his first union address, he highlights the number of conflicts unfolding across the globe (over 40) and argued that, over the last century, ‘Europe’ (the Institutions, member states, and European citizens) managed to resolve conflicts through diplomatic means. Yet this was highly questionable given the EU’s failure in preventing the conflicts in Yugoslavia and Kosovo. Throughout the speech, there is the constant use of the term “we Europeans”. This can be seen as an example of the idea that these were not speeches coming from a European technocrat, but rather, from a European citizen. In all his speeches, there is an underlying argument calling for a collective sense of direction to secure the EU’s future.

The concept of collective responsibility is one of the main issues which Juncker dealt with in this address. Collective responsibility is linked with the various challenges the EU was facing, and its failure to provide long-term solutions. The President of the European Commission declared that the EU needed to do more to protect its citizens, even though the European Border and Coast Guard and FRONTEX in Turkey and Greece were already providing results. However, he argued that this was not enough. Juncker’s solution was to create a European Defence Fund and reinforce Europol. Interestingly enough, no reference was made to the need to safeguard the Ukraine and its citizens, which was one of the main priorities in the first speech.

Collective responsibility was also required to solve the “existential crisis” engulfing the EU. In part this was due to the disagreements which existed on the way forward. Juncker argues that only through collective responsibility could the EU solve the financial crisis, youth unemployment, and social inequality. Youth unemployment was a very critical issue in this address. Juncker declared that “I cannot and will not accept that the millennials, Generation Y, might be the first generation in 70 years to be poorer than their parents.” (Juncker, 2016, p. 6) Juncker uses the first-person singular to underline his disappointment at such a situation. He follows this by stating that the course of action required to help these EU citizens required more youth programmes and training, and the establishment of the European Solidarity Corps with the aim of encouraging youths to volunteer to help those in need. He also argues in favour of a reform of the European telecommunications markets coupled with investment in 5G technology to be completed by 2025. Juncker believed that, through such investment, the EU could provide every city and village in the EU with wireless internet creating approximately 1.3 million jobs in a decade.

Juncker argued that solidarity was the overarching priority needed to tackle the challenges facing the EU. However, solidarity was difficult to achieve due to the various conflicts between European and national interests. These issues were tackled in his speech the following year, following the triggering of Article 50 by the United Kingdom.

State of the Union 2017: Towards a positive Europe: 13 September 2017¹

“In the last year, we saw all 27 leaders walk up the Capitoline Hill in Rome, one by one, to renew their vows to each other and to our Union. All of this leads me to believe: that the wind is back in Europe’s sails. We now have a window of opportunity but it will not stay open forever. Let us make the most of the momentum, catch the wind in our sails” (Juncker, 2017, p. 1).

This 2017 State of the Union address was made after the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, triggered Article 50 thereby initiating the process by which the UK would leave the EU by 29 March 2019. This coincided with the celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. In this speech, there is hardly a reference to Brexit. Instead, Juncker uses this speech to promote an EU narrative based on hope, cultural heritage, freedom, rule of law and equality.

The future of Europe, rather than Brexit, is the central theme of this speech. Reference is made to the White Paper on the Future of Europe (cf. Table 2) which the Commission published in March 2017. This is one of the only speeches addressing alternative options of how the EU could evolve.²

At a time of great uncertainty for the EU, Juncker’s address is based on the history of Europe and its values. From a critical discourse analysis, the value premise takes centre stage. The third person plural “we” is again used to encourage EU institutions, member-states and citizens to work together to build a united and democratic Europe by 2025. As in the previous two speeches, Juncker attributes peace and freedom in Europe to the EU.

The future of Europe, rather than Brexit, is the central theme of this speech. Reference is made to the White Paper on the Future of Europe (cf. Table 2) which the Commission published in March 2017. This White Paper and the different scenarios presented by the European Commission were meant to initiate a debate on the future of Europe. Within this paper, the European Union presented five scenarios, on how the future of the EU would evolve after the UK leaves the European Union. The Commission was proposing five different developments succinctly summed up in five categories; “Carrying on”; “Nothing but the Single Market”; “Those who want more do more”; “Doing less more efficiently”; and “Doing much more together.” These scenarios, therefore, also included the much-dreaded concept of a “two-tier” Europe, and a scaling back of the European integration project. Nonetheless, while the language used by the European Union is considered to be neutral, the Commission did very little to hide its preference for further integration in areas concerning the Single Market and security. Indeed, this is one of the only speeches which directly addresses alternative options of how the EU could evolve.

1 The 2017 State of the Union Address was the first one without a main theme

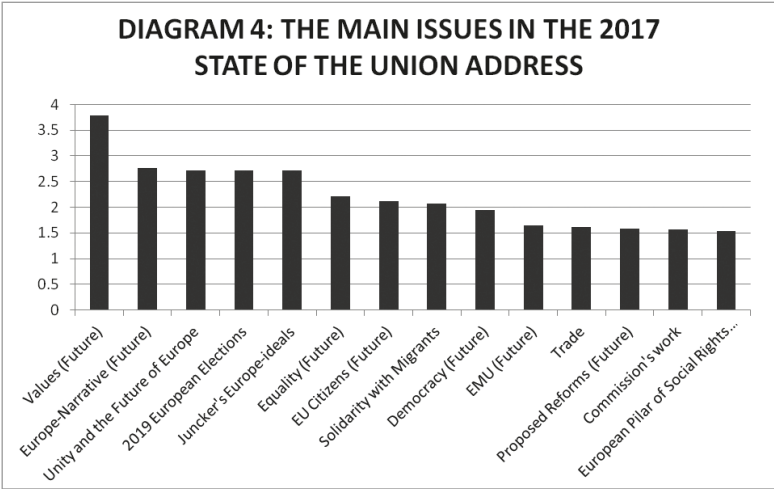
2 This White Paper is extremely important as it proposes five scenarios of how the EU could evolve by 2025.

TABLE 2: THE FIVE SCENARIOS ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Scenarios	Possibility	Meaning
Scenario One	Carrying On	Based on the ‘ New start for Europe ’ and Bratislava documents. This scenario outlines how by 2025, the EU would collaborate for more investment in technology which would include automated cars. On the other hand, the member states should place more security measures at the borders which would have an impact on EU citizens.
Scenario Two	Nothing but the Single Market	Collaboration within the EU would be restricted to some areas due to constant disagreement. By 2025, the Single Market will be strengthened but other areas will fall outside the responsibility of the EU.
Scenario Three	Those who want more do more	Cooperation amongst a number of member states on particular policies. By 2025, some states will agree to harmonise their policies by working together on issues such as security and telecommunications . This harmonisation will not be enforced on the rest of the member states.
Scenario Four	Doing less more efficiently	The EU would develop in areas such as security and telecommunications whilst others would be left within the responsibility of the member states.
Scenario Five	Doing much more together	More powers are shared with the EU which means that by 2025 the role of EU agencies will be strengthened .
European Commission (2017)		

This speech provides a sixth scenario for the future of the EU based on further integration and upon the values of freedom, equality and the rule of law. The concept of unity amongst the EU institutions and member-states is also given considerable importance. One of the central claims is that unity is required for the EU to survive. Juncker declared that the 27-member Council of the European Union, the European Parliament and the European Commission were working together to renew the European project by putting Europe at the heart of it. In reality though, it was apparent that there were serious disagreements between the EU institutions on how to move forward. In this speech, he makes reference to the question of legitimacy which plagues the EU. Juncker claims that Europe needs to be more democratic; he

does so notwithstanding the constant criticism levelled against the Commission over its democratic credentials. The need for serious reforms is again stressed in this address. Juncker proposes that the future of Europe should be discussed during Romania’s 2019 Presidency, in a summit due to take place in Sibiu.



Unity is also linked with the future of Europe. Juncker points out that Europe consists of only 8% of the world population, and this was going to decrease to 5% by 2050. Most of the world powers were shifting their investments towards new and emerging markets in the Pacific or Africa. For this reason, the goal premise here is that the EU member states had to work together to be able to compete with these regions.

In this speech, and as outlined by Diagram 4, Juncker looks ahead to the 2019 EP elections. EU officials were already worried of the consequences of an increased share of the vote for Eurosceptic parties in the 2019 Elections. The dynamics were similar to the 2014 elections: the financial crisis, the migration crisis and Brexit fuelled discontent. Some of the recommendations proposed by Juncker to fight apathy and low turnout were to finance political parties and limit the funds to anti-EU parties since they were being used against the EU itself. Yet, this would not solve the main issues of apathy and low turnout³. Juncker acknowledges that the EU is often criticised for having a democratic deficit. At the same time, he fails to realise that the proposal to block funding for anti-EU parties could be used as an indictment by anti-EU parties who question the democratic legitimacy of the EU. During the speech, Juncker also announced the introduction of a new Code of Conduct for the Commission and praised the Spitzenkandidaten system as a vehicle to provide further legitimacy to the EU. In addition, the creation of a European Pillar of Social Rights was proposed on the premise that it was required to reach citizens who were not able

³ Turnout barely reached 43% in 2014

to reach the standard of living expected in the EU. Despite all these proposals and the establishment of the Citizens' Dialogue, he failed to show how these initiatives could improve election turnout.

The European Monetary Union was also given priority in this address with the circumstantial premise being that of promoting more efficiency within the Single Market. In addition, Juncker declared that the EU had to decrease bureaucracy to allow more states to adopt the Euro. To achieve this, the premise was for the EU to appoint a Finance Minister – undoubtedly a federalist measure – during a time when there were serious objections against further strengthening the EU institutions. In addition, for the sake of efficiency, Juncker argues that the appropriate course of action would be to embrace the Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) system. This speech uncovers the paradox at the heart of the EU decision-making process. On one hand, Juncker was encouraging states to strengthen the EU while, on the other, he indirectly highlights that not everyone will agree on the reforms required which is why QMV is required.

The sixth scenario proposed by Juncker in this address would only be achieved with further reforms. Even though Juncker still campaigned for a European Defence Fund, this element did not feature in this speech. Juncker, instead, projected his vision for a Federal Europe, with a common Finance Minister, one single president for the Council of the EU and Commission which would be able to shape and provide faster solutions to the ongoing problems which the organisation faced.

State of the Union 2018: The Hour of European Sovereignty – 12 September 2018

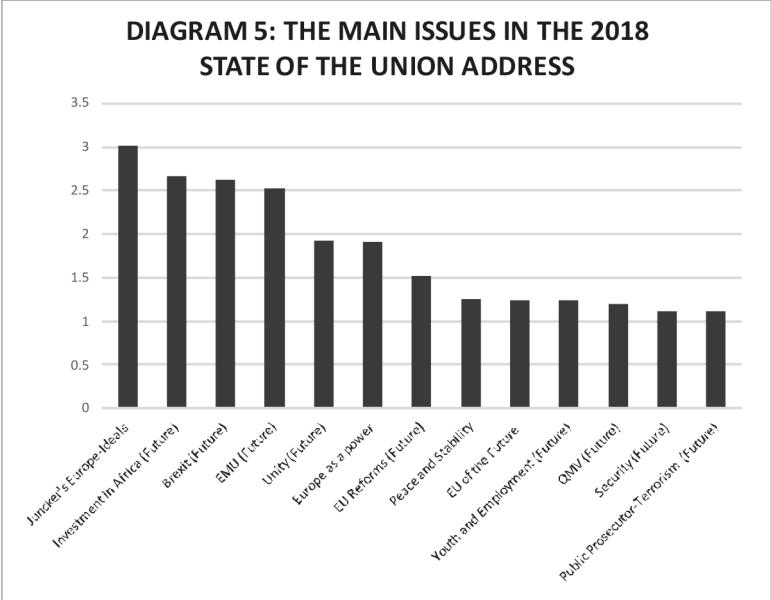
“Living up to Europe’s rallying cry – never again war – is our eternal duty, our perpetual responsibility. We must all remain vigilant” (Juncker, 2018, p. 1).

In his last State of the Union speech, Juncker had to defend the work of his Commission. Under his watch, Britain voted to leave the EU, the financial crisis was still putting pressure on the EMU and, while refugees from Syria declined, this crisis left a long-lasting impact on European states and their citizens.

In this speech, Juncker spoke about his vision of a modern EU. This vision is linked with a stronger economic union, a stronger currency, and the rejection of nationalism which was fuelling the rise of far-right parties. Unlike previous speeches, Juncker adopts a more personal tone and uses the first-person singular

“A few years ago, standing in this very same spot, I told you that Europe was the love of my life. I love Europe still and shall do so forever more” (Juncker, 2018, p. 12).

Juncker’s vision of the EU envisages a proactive role in Africa with a need for further investment in this continent. When making this point, he uses the first-person singular suggesting that this is his own position, rather than that of the Commission. He stresses that over €44 billion is being invested in Africa, and 36% of Africa’s trade is with Europe. Therefore, he argues, the EU should do more to secure a trade agreement which could create further employment in both continents.



Another sector which influenced this speech was youth unemployment. The circumstantial premise here is that youth unemployment in Europe needs to be reduced. He rhetorically asked whether the EU could have a future if its youth were not taken care of. Juncker answers this question by switching to the third person to highlight the need for the EU institutions to spend more on this generation. This is especially important because, indirectly, he is putting the burden on all EU institutions to act and reverse this trend.

Juncker also argues that a stronger EU requires a stronger single currency. He expresses frustration that 80% of the energy bills are paid in Dollars rather than Euros. He explains that the Commission wanted to transform the Euro into one of the most powerful currencies in the world, and the first step towards achieving this was by strengthening the EMU.

The pressing question revolved around how to achieve this when serious disagreements on the way forward persisted. Juncker had been consistent in his speeches by arguing that QMV was the only method by which decisions could be taken in a more efficient manner which is why it had to be used in the EU’s external relations and certain tax matters. He acknowledges that in order to achieve this,

unanimity was required. However, unanimity was difficult to achieve especially when small states feared that QMV would minimise their influence within the EU. In addition, Juncker fails to provide a rationale on why QMV is the most suitable voting system in the institutions.

Another important element from a critical discourse analysis concerns the value premise element, and whether EU values were truly at the centre of reforms. In this instance, Juncker questions whether the EU could move forward if its main values were constantly being ignored by the member-states. The tensions between the media and national governments could not be ignored. The numerous attacks on journalists across the EU had an impact on his views. With three journalists killed in Europe between 2016 and 2018, Juncker appealed for the upholding press freedom.

Due to the marked divisions between Western and Eastern Europe on the future of Europe, the concept of unity featured in this address. He claimed that the West-East divisions enable other powers to shape events in the region. This statement can be regarded as an indirect reference to Russia.

Unity was also problematic within EU institutions. Juncker points out that while 50% of the Commission's recommendations were approved and another 20% implemented, there were still disagreements on the remaining 30%. Through his discourse, he indirectly challenges other institutions to act on the required reforms. He called for unity to strengthen the European Asylum Agency and for security reforms in view of the fact that the Commission wanted to extend the powers of the Public Prosecutor's Office and turn the EU into a security player. Although Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) was introduced in 2017, there were still vast disagreements on whether the EU should become a security player.

In this address, Brexit is also linked to the concept of unity. Juncker declared that the ongoing talks between the EU and the UK, should ensure that there is no hard border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to safeguard the Good Friday Agreement. From another perspective, Juncker declared that the EU should seek a partnership based on trade as outlined by Prime Minister Theresa May:

“This is why I welcome Prime Minister May’s proposal to develop an ambitious new partnership for the future, after Brexit” (Juncker, 2018, p. 9).

In this statement, one can notice the use of the first person singular to highlight Juncker's personal opinion rather than that of his Commission or the EU. Since this was his last speech as President, Juncker wanted to defend the legacy of his Commission, while at the same time, provide a vision of a European Union as a competitive security and economic player which could be pursued further by the next EU Commission.

He defended his legacy at the helm of the Commission, although he failed to meet the expectations of those who wanted a greater sense of leadership. Herszenhorn

(2018) called considered the speech to be “disjointed” and “disorganized”. He argued that Juncker should have defended his legacy and provided a broader vision for the EU which does not necessarily equate to federalism. However, from the Commission’s perspective, one could not have expected anything different when there were such diverging arguments over the European project.

The Future of Europe in Juncker’s State of the Union Addresses

The discourse used by Juncker in the State of the Union and the themes tackled, represent the realities and the challenges that the EU faced during his tenure as President of the European Commission. These speeches, while not as popular as the U.S. or UK counterparts, provide an insight of how the Commission works and the relationship which it has with other EU institutions as well as the member-states.

From a critical discourse analysis, Juncker’s speeches are based on both deliberative rhetoric and policy recommendations. Rhetoric (cf. table 3) is used to remind citizens of the purpose of the European Union, its history, values and principles including the four freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. These were required to push through reforms to strengthen and safeguard the EU for future generations. This was the main goal which Juncker had as President of the European Commission; one which was ultimately jeopardized by Brexit

While these speeches were addressed to the European Parliament, Juncker attempted to expand his audience by targeting other EU institutions, member-states and citizens. Since the objective of strengthening the EU went beyond institutions, this action was both timely and commendable. In fact, the call for ‘Unity’ was apparent in all the above-mentioned speeches. However, ‘Unity’ is more of a political rhetorical flourish than a possible policy outcome.

Juncker also tried to portray the Commission as being humane and understanding of the hardships that citizens were facing due to austerity and unemployment.

Table 3 highlights how Juncker’s goals to strengthen the European Union developed from one speech to another. The majority of these speeches tackled the main issues in the EU including the financial crisis, the Syrian migration crisis, and Brexit with Juncker proposing various courses of action to resolve them. This is the reason, why throughout his term as President of the Commission, the main goals remained the same: to guarantee a future for the EU by strengthening the economic sector, reduce unemployment, and invest in the security and the digital single markets. Nonetheless, with the financial crisis, Brexit and migration still on the agenda and with rising nationalism, he proposed further reforms.

TABLE 3: ELEMENTS CONCERNING THE FUTURE OF EUROPE WHICH JUNCKER’S SPEECHES

Elements	2015	2016	2017	2018
Claim	The European Union needs economic and political reforms to survive.	EU should invest in its youth and protect its borders.	EU requires more reforms to reduce unemployment and poverty. QMV should be used for the single market.	The EU needs Unity to move forward and QMV to pass required legislation.
Circumstantial premises	Agenda influenced by the challenges being faced by the EU and its member-states	Agenda influenced by high unemployment and the ongoing financial crisis.	Agenda influenced by the financial crisis, rising unemployment and the international system.	Agenda influenced by the work done by the Commission between 2014 and 2018.
Goal premises	To stabilise Greece, and to promote further economic investment, promote climate change and transform the EU into a security player.	Provide youth with more opportunities to secure their future, and transform the EU into a security player.	To establish a Defence Union, strengthen the European Monetary Union, and solve the migration problem.	To provide a future for European youths, and strengthen EU institutions to ensure that they can withstand challenges.
Value premises	Reforms have to be enacted to strengthen EU values and principles which include the four freedoms, democracy, and respect for human rights.	Freedom, Democracy and rule of law should be the foundation of EU reforms.	The EU values should cover all EU citizens. The EU cannot have second-class citizens.	EU values should be at the foundation of these reforms. EU values should be embraced by individual states with respect to all citizens and other institutions such as the press.

TABLE 3: ELEMENTS CONCERNING THE FUTURE OF EUROPE WHICH JUNCKER'S SPEECHES				
Elements	2015	2016	2017	2018
Means goal premises	If reforms are enacted, EU will be safeguarded for future generations.	Reforms are needed to reduce youth unemployment.	Reforms are needed to strengthen the economic institutions of the EU.	Reforms should be enacted to turn the EU into a global power.

The main vision was underscored by the need to secure the European project by bringing it closer to its people. This can be considered as the sixth scenario for the future of Europe, which requires the EU to tackle further reforms including the appointment of one President for both the Council and the Commission and transforming the EU into a 'quasi' federal state. While federalism was never discussed in the speech, the proposed reforms point to that line of thinking.

Whilst the speeches might not have convinced audiences, they did provide the EP and member-states with an agenda which they could work upon. However, as Juncker rightly pointed out, the biggest weakness within the EU lies in its failure to portray a unified approach. The organisation struggles to find short-and long-term solutions in the face of the rising challenges which are threatening its future stability.

Future of the EU: The way ahead

At the start of his presidency, Mr Juncker had announced that he would only be a one-term President of the Commission, and indeed a new President of the Commission was elected in 2019. However, this president was not one of the spitzenkandidaten proposed by the main political blocs. The 2019 EP Election results weakened the main political blocks and led to the rise of the Renew Europe group (RE), the European/Greens Free Alliance and Identity and Democracy (ID). The European Council ignored the spitzenkandidaten process, and proposed Ursula von der Leyen as candidate for the Commission presidency. Whilst she was ultimately approved by the EP, the whole process has certainly increased the tensions between the EU institutions.

As President-elect of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen (2019) used her first speech to call for a stronger Europe based on the need to safeguard the future of the EU by proposing various reforms, including the strengthening of the EP. It remains to be seen how far she will succeed, given the current divisions on how to move forward with the project.

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