

EUROPEAN UNION, EMPLOYMENT AND DEMOCRACY

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**Mouvement Européen
France**

**! DROIT D'INVENTAIRE
D'INVENTER**

European Movement-France and Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute hosted the third debate in a cycle entitled “Right of inventory - Right to invent: 60 years of Europe, successes worth keeping - solutions yet to be invented” in La Rochelle on 7 February 2014, allowing the audience to address the following issue: “Democracy and employment: challenges for the European Union”.

Michel Caniaux, president of European Movement-France in Charente-Maritime, opened the debate with a few initial remarks and a reminder of the importance of the European Union (EU) to a peripheral region like Charente-Maritime. Julien Carpentier, project manager for European Movement-France presented the “Right of inventory - Right to invent” cycle for which citizen debates are held in the eight French European Parliament constituencies, addressing four major issues: democracy, employment, the euro and globalisation.

The dialogue, moderated by the European blogger, Fabien Cazenave, then continued on the subject of employment and democracy with the audience and the following guests:

- Maxime Bono, mayor of La Rochelle
- Philippe Herzog, founding chairman of Confrontations Europe
- Ignacio Diego Palacios, president of the Atlantic Arc Commission (CPRM)
- Gilles Savary, member of the French National Assembly



1. Citizenship: solutions to citizen apathy

With the European elections just a few months away, Philippe Herzog sensed indifference, genuine

hostility towards the EU, and/or a definite degree of apathy on the part of citizens.

This, despite the timing of the 2014 European elections, when the EU is faced with important choices. Gilles Savary pointed out that the crisis in the EU has driven the continent to a survival-of-the-fittest stance which divides the union: a governmental EU, beyond democratic control, has surpassed the EU as a community, even though the EU was a farsighted project that allowed member states to remain on the international scene. A national backslide now is madness; one cannot be smaller in a bigger world (Gilles Savary) and globalisation is a reality, Maxime Bono pointed out. European nation-states must regain their sovereignty at the European level to solve their problems, export their models and values, and share their knowledge with neighbours (Philippe Herzog). Ignacio Diego Palacios believed that the EU will get back on its feet with the support of member states. The EU helped them in their time of need; it is their turn to do the same.

In view of this situation, the European campaign needs to be assertive, offensive and supportive of change while remaining pro-European (Philippe Herzog) and simple (Gilles Savary).

European citizenry currently suffers from apathy on the part of those who do not view the EU as their own (Philippe Herzog). This is the result of poor tutelage by leaders of nation-states, who misrepresent what happens in Brussels.

Michel wondered how these issues could be resolved? Was the biggest problem a lack of information, added Patrick? How can we build a European society, asked an audience member?

Information is indeed distorted, be it by the media, national governments, or regions. In the case of fish quotas, for example (Maxime Bono), the EU stated that 60% of stocks - up from 30% previously - could be fished since they were now sustainable species as a result of the quotas. In the press, European citizens read that fishing must stop because 60% of species were endangered. This distorted information discredited the EU and raises the issue of authority. Fabien Cazenave asked whether a 'cucumber' Europe could inspire people, after Michel's comment that the EU should deal with important issues instead of grading eggs. The EU also deals with finance and major transnational issues, but communicating highly technical information to the public is difficult.

Likewise, information can be hijacked by national governments and regions, which take credit for successful EU actions. A U.S. citizen said she was surprised that, compared to Spain, there were few signs posted in France to indicate that an entity had received European funding. Allan also asked how citizens - and youth in particular - could take ownership of the EU other than through symbols like flags or signs. To this end, Michel would like to see an Olympic medal count for the EU instead of individual member states. It is important to provide more information and improve EU visibility, but it is difficult to communicate about data, even if it reflects European solidarity (Maxime Bono). The flags of France, the EU and the U.N. fly in front of La Rochelle City Hall, and a square and roundabout have been named after Europe. These symbols are a good opportunity to explain what they represent. The EU played a key role in the redevelopment of La Rochelle, for example. Thanks to the 37 million euros in European funding received, the city was able to build the university during a very difficult time of industrial decline.

The EU must arouse interest but also touch the hearts of its citizens (Philippe Herzog). More than just communication and information, it needs to become an experience. We need to develop exchanges, especially for young people. When they discover Krakow, Florence, Paris, London and Athens, they realise how richly diverse European culture is - this generates a sense of belonging (Gilles Savary).

Michel Caniaux would also like European youth to travel, but who pays? Pierre added that a number of Erasmus grants are not actually used because the amount provided is small and parents cannot provide the rest. Other programmes exist, like agreements

between apprenticeship schools, and school trips which are financed by the regional government (Maxime Bono).

The European Parliament deals with very concrete issues; communication needs to be improved to better inform citizens about what it does (Ignacio Diego Palacios).



2. Democracy: renewed power to manage the breakdown of the representative system

Citizen apathy is not only due to a lack of information: the EU system is complex.

In Alice's view, citizen's lack interest because European construction is anti-democratic. They feel as though their vote has no impact. For this reason, along with other EU citizens, they have created randomly-drawn lists for the EU elections based on democracy in Ancient Greece. This raises the issue of sustainability in representative systems and leadership. This crisis is not only European, however; democracy is a domestic challenge as well (Philippe Herzog).

This was related to Gerard's question: who calls the shots in the EU. Even though citizens voted down the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, the Treaty of Lisbon, which includes most of the content of the former, was signed. This lack of clarity in decision-making powers raises several questions concerning TAFTA¹ and the legitimacy of a rotating presidency when it falls to Greece, itself governed by the EU troika.

The EU system is completely different to the French system. The EU is neither a federal system nor a simple association of states. It is governed by its member states and the European Parliament has little - if any - power to act (Gilles Savary). It is a real clash of cultures. The European Parliament is a multicultural assembly where dialogue is more candid. It is

an arena where all of Europe's cultures meet and compromise is needed to find solutions. There is no systematic majority like at the French National Assembly, where deputies' votes are dictated by their political party. Member states carry considerable weight in other European institutions. Mario Draghi does not govern the European Central Bank (ECB) alone, for example. He is assisted by national governors who are nominated by member state governments (Maxime Bono).

This explains why citizens question how much power they have in this system. Confusion surrounding the Constitutional Treaty and Treaty of Lisbon came from an undervaluation of the "no" vote in France (Philippe Herzog). French rejection of the Constitutional treaty was not just a Eurosceptic vote; it included federalists who disliked a flawed project, and those who used the vote to sanction the government in power at the time. The Constitutional Treaty was premature in the absence of shared vision. The Treaty of Lisbon is not an exact copy of the Constitutional Treaty; it codifies a status-quo which emerged from previous treaties. Furthermore, France and the Netherlands may have voted "no", but Spanish citizens voted "yes". The point is to listen to all European citizens (Ignacio Diego Palacios, Gilles Savary). France has tried to impose its vision on the EU since European construction began. A social Europe, including a minimum wage, is a French conception of the EU. France has always played a leading role in European construction, but after the "no" vote in 2005, it has lost some clout (Gilles Savary). All countries need to be heard.

The upcoming European elections are the first since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, which improves institutional transparency - a prerequisite to earning citizen trust (Maxime Bono). One example: for the first time, the President of the Commission will be elected based on the outcome of the elections (Philippe Herzog). The new president will have a real mandate to implement European policy and face major challenges (Ignacio Diego Palacios).

The real question today is what policies the EU will use to support the single market and reduce unemployment (Philippe Herzog).

3. Employment: waging a political battle

Employment - youth employment in particular - must become the EU's number one priority. Youth unemployment is calamitous, and yet it is young people who will lead the EU tomorrow.

There is a parallel, demographic challenge - the EU is aging. The post-war baby boom is becoming a pensioner boom (Ignacio Diego Palacios). The labour force needs to grow.

Situations in member states vary, particularly between north and south: in northern countries, more workers are needed, and in southern countries, unemployment rates are high. Youth mobility is a short-term solution but systemic reform is needed in the long term to improve child care, for instance, to make parenthood more compatible with a career, and to improve immigration, productivity, industrial innovation, and ensure that training is tailored to the job market. Member states must show more solidarity, particularly in the euro area, since they are interdependent. Social and fiscal harmonisation is needed (Maxime Bono). Patrick pointed out that the EU is powerless to solve unemployment, and the creation of appropriate tools requires a bigger budget.



As a result, the EU must define a new model of growth. This political battle must be led by citizens, who have an opportunity to express their opinion. The EU can adapt to globalisation - a brutal shock but a source of development nonetheless (Philippe Herzog). This is why the EU developed a continent-wide internal market. All countries face the same conditions. The success of some is an indication that possibilities exist (Gilles Savary). The crisis highlights the need to find joint solutions (Ignacio Diego Palacios).

Francis asked a question regarding ways to avoid social dumping and the victory of liberalism. Annie

wondered if a European minimum wage is possible since there was now one in Germany. It was no doubt a harmonisation measure all EU countries felt was necessary (Ignacio Diego Palacios). A European social contract must be established, along with common, shared strategies on employment, health and education. Such harmonisation measures must be adapted to vastly different contexts in certain countries (Philippe Herzog).

Pierre wondered what consequences would result from the re-establishment of customs barriers? But the effects are not measurable (Philippe Herzog). If everyone closes their borders, countries will face a new worldwide depression, since their wealth is based on trade.

Citizens are concerned about TAFTA. The EU must present a united front and defend its values in negotiations with major powers like the United States. Certain matters like finance and data protection

were included in talks, but for that to happen member states need to agree on what they want - a difficult task in today's climate. That being said, the European Parliament has granted the Commission a mandate to negotiate this treaty, which reflects the majority position of European countries.

The EU can also move towards a "green" economy in preparation of the energy transition away from oil, as well as a new form of urban planning that puts people first (Philippe Herzog). The EU can also develop a "blue" economy with more attractive and sustainable maritime professions (Ignacio Diego Palacios). The EU must invest in forward-looking infrastructure and policy which will possibly offer millions of jobs. In addition to these measures, the euro area needed certain tools to work properly: borrowing and guarantee capacities from the ECB, investment funds and better economic governance (Philippe Herzog). For all that, Europe alone can only help stabilise - not solve - global problems.

Pictures and the podcast of this debate are available on our website.

1. Transatlantic Free Trade, also known as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

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ISSN 2257-5510

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