

THE EU NEEDS A FRESH BOOST... FAST!

Jacques Delors, António Vitorino and the participants of the Jacques Delors Institute
2014 European Steering Committee

The participants of our 2014 European Steering Committee underline that the European authorities appointed in the wake of the elections in May 2014 have a historic task ahead of them, via a final declaration entitled: “The EU needs a fresh boost... Fast!”.

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The European authorities appointed in the wake of the elections in May 2014 have a historic, not to say overwhelming, task ahead of them. Faced with the pressure being brought to bear by eurosceptics and europhobes alike, it falls to them to urgently impart a fresh thrust to the European construction – a process which may be the target of greater criticism than ever before but which continues to be crucial in a world where globalisation is advancing while Europe is shrinking and growing old.

1. Europeans looking out at the world

The Europeans will find the fuel to impart this new boost to their construction process primarily by casting their gaze over the world at large far more than they have done during the endless and devastating crisis in the euro area. Seen from Beijing, from Brasilia or from Bamako, we are already united around the will to reconcile economic efficiency, social cohesion and environmental safeguards in a pluralistic framework. We must unite further in order to promote this common will, along with our interests and our values, in an increasingly less eurocentric world through the adoption of more consistent trade and external aid policies, the creation of a genuine energy union, and the patient bolstering of our common foreign and defence policy, because strength lies in numbers! This Union naturally needs the United Kingdom – but only as long as a majority of its citizens still wish to be a part of it, because the Union is by no means a prison! It may expand after 2020 to embrace other neighbouring countries, essentially in the Balkans, but its priority in the short term is to move forward simultaneously at

the EU28 scale and in the context of the euro area, in order to reach the kind of growth and employment levels capable of reviving both its dynamism at the internal level and its credibility in the external arena.

2. Making better use of the opportunities that the EU offers

Imparting a fresh thrust to the EU also includes making better use of the opportunities that it offers as a space for economic and human exchange and as a public power. Even if the nation states continue to be the masters of their major choices in the economic, educational and social spheres, emerging from the crisis also involves Europe! We must deepen the Single Market in the spheres of the service industry, the digital economy, capital markets and major infrastructures in order to foster more quality-oriented growth as well as jobs. And we must emerge once and for all from the lethal competition besetting the social and fiscal spheres. We must safeguard and promote the free movement of workers and of people, on which millions of jobs depend, in compliance with the principle of non-discrimination, and we must complete this free movement system with a common, solidarity-based immigration policy. We must spend and invest more together, including by displaying vigorous support for the plan proposed by the Juncker Commission, despite all its limitations, and by calling on the member states and on private players to match that plan with their own investments to a far greater degree. We must act together in the struggle against youth unemployment so as to avert the threat of a lost generation. We must complete the Economic and Monetary Union by

complying with the major principles and regulations on which that union is based, in particular with regard to monitoring excessive debt (not debt itself), while at the same time endowing it with the political tools required to bolster its legitimacy and the financial tools needed for stabilisation and for aid with reforms, so as to avert any chance of a return to the “IMF-Europe” of the past few years.

3. The EU as an answer to threats

Many Europeans have experienced this “IMF-Europe” as a threat, because it has been a purveyor of aid pegged to painful and unfair budget cuts and reforms. People too often forget that it has had the merit of organising the very solidarity between member states that had been called into question on more than one occasion. Imparting a fresh thrust to the European construction also means allowing the EU to be perceived not as a threat but as an answer to the threats and challenges fuelling people’s fears while at the same time actually strengthening the benefits to be gained from uniting. Those threats include: the showdown with Vladimir Putin and the instability besetting numerous neighbouring countries that we need to support in their struggle (in Ukraine as well as in Tunisia);

the existence of terrorist hotbeds in the Sahel and in the Near East; the ravages of “mad” finance and of unbridled tax optimisation; the spectres of deflation and of de-industrialisation; the risks occasioned by a changing climate and by our dependence on external energy sources... Europe’s new decision-makers may give in to the easy temptation to restrict the production of misunderstood and ridiculed environmental or health measures whose technical virtue is frequently less than the political damage that they cause. But at the end of the day, it is on their ability to respond effectively to the main threats and challenges which the Europeans are having to face that they are going to be judged at the end of their mandates.

The Community adventure was launched over sixty years ago to stimulate our reconstruction and to forge a space for peace and for mutual respect in the face of a divided Europe. It needs to prove today, more than ever before in its history, that it has the dual ability both to stimulate and to protect the citizens whom it is called on to serve over the coming years – years which look set to be of crucial importance. Ladies and gentlemen in charge of the European institutions, time is of the essence!

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