

NOTRE EUROPE STEERING COMMITTEE

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In the face of crisis, there is a need for Europe

The current global economic crisis is the most serious one facing Europe since the Second World War. At this stage it is impossible to foresee the outcome and the duration of the significant changes unfolding before our eyes. Europe is not sheltered from the present storm: it will emerge either strengthened, or seriously undermined by internal conflict. As is often the case, this adversity is at once an opportunity and a threat.

In the face of the crisis, the Union has many advantages. The remarkable increase in wellbeing in all states that have joined the EU project is a product of the great internal market, founded – in Jacques Delors' words – on "competition that stimulates, cooperation that strengthens, and solidarity that unites". The Union's balanced conception of the respective roles of the market and the state is strengthened by a social model which will mitigate the effects of economic slowdown. In the euro zone, the single currency represents a solid bulwark against financial turbulence.

Despite these advantages, if the political response to a systemic challenge is not itself systemic, the chances of success will be slim. The Union – not member states acting independently or in only vague coordination – must develop a set of measures to confront the crisis. This is the right moment to re-launch the proposition – contained in the 1993 White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment – for a 'Eurobond' to finance major infrastructure projects in the common European interest. The crisis must impel Europe to complete the Economic and Monetary Union by strengthening its economic component.

The Union's continuity and coherence of action must be guaranteed by the European Commission, the institution whose very mission is the common European interest. The proper functioning of the institutional triangle – which it forms with the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament – depends on the Commission's capacity to mount initiatives and to preserve the spirit of the European project.

The election of the new Parliament in June 2009 will be an opportunity to strengthen the legitimacy of the new Commission's leadership. In this context, the time has come to act on the proposition, put forward by the Steering Committee of Notre Europe in 1998, that during the campaign each European political family present a candidate for the post of President of the European Commission, and that this candidate engage in debate with his or her opponents. Europeans must feel that they have clear political choices regarding European issues as well as personalities who embody them. The 2009 European elections are an opportunity that must not be missed.

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