

STRENGTHENING EUROPE'S POSITION IN THE WORLD

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Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, EuroCité and Europartenaïres hosted a conference on 16 September 2013 in Paris entitled "European elections 2014: the debate is now!" to address the major issues in the upcoming May 2014 European elections and help initiate the public debate that the elections will generate. This synthesis looks at important questions raised at the "Strengthening Europe's position in the world" round table.

Introduction

Moderated by EuroCité President Nicolas Leron, round table discussions opened on a point of consensus for all participants: the European Union (EU) must find a sustainable way out of the crisis and strengthen its **political union** if it is to maintain its position on the international stage. Attention was also focused on the need to reinforce **Europe's foreign policy and take action to address the challenges raised by instability in the Arab world.**

Participants in the debate:

- **Elisabeth Guigou**, chair of the Foreign affairs committee of the French National assembly,

founding chair of Europartenaïres, former minister and member of the Board of Directors of *Notre Europe - Institut Jacques Delors*;

- **Bernard Guetta**, commentator, international affairs, France Inter radio;
- **Pascal Lamy**, former director-general of the World trade organization, honorary president of *Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute*;
- **Bernadino León**, EU Special representative for the Southern Mediterranean region.

Moderator: **Nicolas Leron**, president of EuroCité.



1. In the eye of the hurricane: challenges and priorities for the EU

For Elisabeth Guigou, the EU was enduring no ordinary economic crisis but **a profound shift in global affairs**. Third countries are asking themselves questions about EU's internal refereeing and the direction it is taking. Europe can only make its voice heard by focusing all of its energy on **getting out of the current financial, economic and social crisis and by consolidating the single currency**. This requires a higher degree of political integration and greater sovereignty over monetary, economic, fiscal and social policy. **Democratic legitimacy at the European level** also needs to be reinforced.

For Pascal Lamy, development policy, the environment, trade and the European neighbourhood policy were the **four standard-bearers of the EU on the world stage**. Before the crisis the debate was centred on these issues, on matters of security, defence and on stabilising the EU's economic position. But influence is a function of economic and social success; now, with the crisis, the question at stake is no longer about strengthening but rather about restoring EU position in the world. However, the euro alone, often associated with Germany, has retained credibility. Consolidating the single currency is therefore the best path forward, given that **Europe's economic and social model has been affected but not toppled by the crisis**. Elisabeth Guigou also highlighted the positive light in which non-Europeans view European influence despite the crisis and cautioned against excessive pessimism.

Pascal Lamy raised a red flag over the importance given to Eurobarometer by the rest of the world and over levels of European support for the European project: citizen support is in continuous decline and mistrust has deepened with the crisis. The future of further integration is cast into question. Europeans need to re-establish trust in their economic and social model.

2. Strengthening EU foreign policy around the globe

Bernadino León discussed the importance of **building a fully-fledged European foreign policy**. Although European identity and legitimacy are important issues, they orbit a more crucial question: "what does Europe do?". Answers can be found by exploring EU foreign policy.

The EU Special representative for the Southern Mediterranean region went on to say that if democracy does not prevail in the Middle East, the status of the EU will be weakened. Foreign policy is defined by its ability to transform the external environment; the Arab Spring represents an inescapable ontological challenge to the credibility of EU foreign policy and the union's very existence. **Events in Europe's neighbouring countries engender a need for greater political integration in matters of external policy**. A shift to a common foreign policy was underway at the institutional level but in practice, foreign policy remains the prerogative of member states. Common political will is crucial in restoring EU credibility.

Only the EU can rise above the specific viewpoints and strategic interests of each member states and take action within its sphere of influence to defend democratic values - the basis of both its diplomatic DNA and common interests. Communication and trust towards third countries were problematic issues for them, and member states needed to present the main priorities of European foreign policy more clearly.

Elisabeth Guigou contended that defining common foreign policy goals necessarily implies the creation of a European defence industry: being a large, demilitarised Switzerland is not an option for the EU.



3. Upsetting the geopolitical balance

As Elisabeth Guigou commented, the EU is no longer the world power it was in the 20th century. In a multipolar – or apolar – world, relative EU influence has diminished. Bernadino León stated that in **decades to come, no member state will hold sufficient political or economic clout to be a member of the G8.**

Bernard Guetta observed that the Russian-American Summit in Geneva in September 2013 is the culmination of a process underway for some time now and marks a historic shift. The US, whose vital interests have moved to the Pacific region and who is engaged in an economic stand-off with superpower China, **are withdrawing from the Middle East.** The US maintains an interest in the region, of course, but to a lesser degree: jihadism is no longer a strategic threat, and the energy independence afforded by shale gas makes them less reliant on Middle Eastern oil. Russia has demonstrated a desire to become a responsible leader within its sphere of influence, **which could facilitate closer ties with the EU.**

Elisabeth Guigou explained that the strategic pivot of the US to the Pacific means the EU must secure its influence in the Mediterranean. Europe took action quickly: at the December meeting of the European Council, discussions with heads of state and government will focus on defence in Europe.

4. Developing a European project

Participants agreed on the importance of finding a new meaning and common project for the EU – the only way it can heighten its legitimacy and earn further trust from third-party countries. The direction it should be steered in, and the content of European policy, are debatable, however.

Elisabeth Guigou highlighted an urgent need to invent new arguments in favour of legitimacy: the textbook notion of a Europe built on peace **no longer mobilises Europeans.** The key to restoring EU legitimacy lies in its ability to interpret and understand the concerns of European citizens, and their disinterest can only be reversed by finding a sustainable end to the euro zone crisis. Participants agreed that institutional reform is desirable as long as it is driven by true political will.

In terms of foreign policy, Elisabeth Guigou urged Europe to ensure its voice was heard in the world by confirming the identity-related values it has cultivated over centuries and which unite Europeans in their diversity. According to Bernadino León, “if we believe that these values should prevail in the world, then the whole world, not just the European Union, needs foreign policy to be strengthened.”

Bernard Guetta and Elisabeth Guigou agreed on the **need for a European defence programme.** Exemplary behaviour and moral persuasion are completely honourable, said Mr Guetta, but are not enough to ensure these values are respected. **Rules must be defended by force.**

For Pascal Lamy, Europe will not restore its position in the world by enhancing its institutional complex or common policy but by believing in its values – in the European model of a social market economy. The former WTO Director-General explained that only a European identity founded on this very specific model could serve to press ahead and complete **the mission that progressive forces gave to Europe: to civilise globalisation.**

To conclude, Elisabeth Guigou confirmed that both European Council meetings scheduled this fall, on euro zone progress and foreign policy, will be crucial to making the European project credible in view of the 2014 European elections.



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