

THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) ON THE BRINK – TIME TO SHOW GRIT

“Nationalism is war”

Francois Mitterrand, Strasbourg 1984

“We need to replace the language of accountants with the poetry of bards”

Bronislaw Geremek

No doubt about it: the EU is on the brink. This constitutes a huge danger, but it could be turned into an opportunity. Since the outbreak of the financial disaster in 2008, member state governments and the European Commission have been hopping from summit to summit, plagued by their inability to act adequately on the various challenges they have had to face, and without a care to the proposals and initiatives coming from both the European Parliament and civil society. Too little, too late, too scattered, too technocratic and too undermined by the many reluctant member states? Yes. But still strong and too necessary to be left abandoned. The necessity of a united Europe is why we want to change the EU.

The multiplication of walls and fences between countries and peoples could be the straw breaking the camel's back, destroying the EU already tainted by disunion. Riddled with sharp divisions and inequalities mirroring those existing at the national level, the EU has lost clout and legitimacy each time its national governments responded with a resounding “NO” to a common solution.¹

As a consequence of this self-inflicted and increasing collective weakness, the forces opposing the EU have been strengthened, even without directly entering many governments. Bolstered by a new generation of populist leaders, these movements gained enough dynamic to seriously disrupt democratic communality in many countries, to taint the European Parliament, and to interfere with the balance of power between the member states. Still, today's crisis is not the sole responsibility of populist and nationalist movements. Deaths in the Mediterranean, closing of the borders, breaches of Human Rights, secret negotiations on the TTIP fall under the responsibility of current ruling majorities.

What will it take to bring European governments, media outlets and the public at large back to the

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E.g. on debt pooling and solidarity at the beginning of the sovereign debt crisis; on a proposal to increase the EU budget in order to support investments and economic recovery; on the threats to the rule of law and democracy in Romania, Hungary, Poland, etc.; on the need for transparency and public scrutiny in international trade negotiations; on the urgency for more ambitious targets and policies to combat climate change; and on the adequate redistribution of refugees).

awareness that only EU solutions and solidarity are fit to address the current challenges? Since regression is always possible, a new trajectory has to be based on proposals that demonstrate that the EU is the adequate framework to deal with global challenges. To reach this goal we are building alliances with democratic, social and environmental forces and movements. But what we need most urgently is to find ways to rekindle the desire for European integration, through renewed purpose and direction.

Many national governments blamed problems of a changing world on the EU. As Greens we see European integration as part of the answer for the challenges we are facing together. Breaking the European project would on the contrary make joint solutions more difficult. That is also why we want the UK to stay part of the European Union.

The European construction must be a shared project and horizon; a democratic union based on a community of values and not just of currencies, not an end in itself but a tool to build a just, safe and sustainable society. It will take more than a single market or a single currency in order to strengthen peace, tame globalisation, defend civic and human rights and organise a transition towards a sustainable Green economic and social system. Much in the same way, none of these crucial challenges can be tackled with a return to nationalism and chauvinism.

It is time to step up to the plate to show fighting spirit and to wage a valiant struggle for the European dream.

Think EUROPEAN, act Green:

1. Our cultures and societies are stronger than those who gain consensus through fear and claims of simplistic solutions; we are convinced that current tendencies leaning towards a disaggregation of the EU project can be stopped. Despite what Euro-sceptics and other anti-EU forces say, Europe is the future of democracy – it's about reclaiming power and sovereignty at the level where it is yielded, and from international corporation, financial markets, transnational networks and organised crime. The future of democracy will also be played out both on a local, national and global level and we will be all the more secure if we will play together with our neighbors: it is a fascinating challenge, and we are ready for it. This challenge is about opening a reform process that would not only allow the construction of truly democratic institutional framework but also a shared ownership of the European political space.
2. In a world where currently more than 60 million people have had to leave behind their homes due to conflict or natural and climatic events, going back to borders and building real or imaginary fences between EU countries is wrong. Borders are a reality, but to try making them

impenetrable is not only morally unacceptable but politically ineffective and economically disastrous: they violate our values of human rights and freedom as established by International and EU Law and do not ensure our security; they increase the human suffering of refugees who are left stranded; they instill a sense of failure in European citizens, who see borders and barriers erected once again after it took so long to tear them down; and they have an absurd economic cost (up to 110 billions euro in the next 10 years²), where security measures are wasted on helpless women, men and children instead of on effectively using our means to stop war, terrorism and its causes. Solidarity, respect of human rights and rule of law are among the very reasons which attract so many people to our shores: they are the most effective approach to find working solutions at a sustainable cost, the prerequisite to govern a situation which is challenging, but perfectly manageable for the richest continent on earth. Just imagine how many decent shelters or integration measures could have been organised with the supposed 106 million euros spent in Hungary to build its fences, or the 200 million pounds spent by the UK to stop migrants and asylum seekers in Calais. Our main message is one of building a collective “common sense”, able to face what is no more an emergency but is becoming a “new normal”; a collective “common sense”, which radically rejects the catchy logic of populist and nationalist rhetoric, simply because their solutions never functioned. Let us reassert this truth: solidarity works.

3. Years of blind austerity measures, promoted under the flag of pursuing necessary reforms, where public expenditure and investments were treated as deficits to be cut, contributed to bringing many EU economies to a standstill; they helped undermining the European promise of shared prosperity, brought back resentment and prejudice between Europeans and made void the value of solidarity. We witness the feeling of a growing distance between technocratic elites and citizens. But opposing austerity and technocracy is not sufficient to turn our fate around: we must indeed build a new future on the basis of sustainability within planetary boundaries. In the framework of a wider democratic reform, aimed at overcoming its current deficit of decision-capacity and legitimacy, the EU must change its economic governance. We need a roadmap with a timetable for EMU reform, including its democratisation. In particular, it is necessary to limit and frame the powers of the Eurogroup, where we should get rid of its opaque, informal procedures and uncontrollable decisions and make it subject to the rules of normal EU decision-making. Moreover, the European Parliament must be able to fully participate in the decision making process of all economic and financial matters. The President of the Commission should continue to be elected by the European Parliament after a public process enhancing citizens' participation and involving European parties (Spitzenkandidaten). And national parliaments should make their

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<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-migrants-schengen-france-idUKKCN0VC0HX>

Adopted Resolution

governments accountable over how they act on the EU level. This can happen only with the strengthening of a European public sphere, of Europe-wide media and political debates over our shared continent.

4. Besides preparing future reforms, we need to stop and revert the erosion of common rules and long established social rights, which is today underway. The drift towards a subtle dismantlement of crucial citizens' rights, a progressive emptying of the right of non discrimination of workers, and the introduction of loopholes and exceptions in the right of free establishment and circulation, are not just a cynical attempt to convince a reluctant national public opinion to stay in a less united Europe. They are a danger for all EU citizens. Too much political capital and a feeling of togetherness has already been wasted: we have to counter arguments in favor of re-nationalisation, by showing that a strong European framework can enlarge the scope of rights and freedoms for its citizens, and not restrict them. Enhanced cooperation among member states could be a useful tool.

But even the best procedures and decision-making are no guarantee that policies themselves will change. We need coherent EU wide political action and new alliances, to reverse the ongoing trend of unsustainable growth, scarce and low paid jobs, waste of talent, continued social exclusion and weak energy policies; we must take up the results and the global responsibilities derived from the Paris Accord. A "Green New Deal" is at the core of our European economic and social agenda: going Green is the most promising way to create jobs of quality and innovative economic activities, in which individual initiatives, a better distribution of profits and technological innovation are coherent with the need for an ecological transition, an ambitious sustainable investment policy. A new European investment strategy should focus on promoting resource and energy efficiency, the digitalization of industry and new industrial production technologies, while also safeguarding social justice. The EU should finally meet its responsibility to tackle the global climate crisis.

In these troublesome times, when so many doubt the value of our common endeavour, we have to remember what a group of young prisoners of the fascist regime on a remote island wrote in 1941, in the midst of the Second World War, when Hitler seemed unstoppable: "*A free and united Europe is the necessary premise to the strengthening of modern civilization, for which the totalitarian era represented a standstill.*"³ It is our obligation to continue defending this project.

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In 1941, Ernesto Rossi and Altiero Spinelli, drew up a manifesto "for a free and united Europe" while held captive on the Italian island of Ventotene. It is commonly referred to as the Ventotene

There are a good number of reasons for pursuing the unfinished business of political integration in Europe. The achievement of a truly continental democracy might be the most compelling one. With fundamental, civic and social rights, the building of national democracy has been a historical journey of collective conquests and counter-balances to dominant established powers. The existence of a “problem with democracy” remains one of the most resilient thorns in the side of European politics, and a vicious circle when it comes to declining election turnout, credibility and legitimacy.

The next chapter in the history of democracy could then be to complete the enlargement of the scope of rights and freedoms beyond their national framework, and not to crush individual differences and cultures, but to make them safer and stronger.

We are and will remain committed Europeans, even in difficult times. We will continue to champion reform with courage and conviction – to make Europe a more prosperous, free and safe place for all.