

United for Europe

15.07.2005

Translation

By the presidents of Austria, Heinz Fischer; Finland, Tarja Halonen; Germany, Horst Köhler; Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi; Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga; Poland, Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Portugal, Jorge Fernando Branco de Sampaio

I.

The outcome of the referenda in France and the Netherlands showed that many citizens feel that European policy falls short of their expectations. While most do support the European project, they are uneasy about how it is carried out. They feel excluded both from decisions of major importance for their future and from those which impact their own everyday life.

All too often, key European questions have not been debated broadly enough before decisions were taken.

To many people, the regulatory impetus of the EU seems exaggerated. Decision-making procedures are often too unclear and the decision-makers too anonymous.

And above all else, too often people have been willing to make Brussels the scapegoat for problems at home. This casts a bad light on a good project.

We are convinced that the European Union needs strong, influential and efficient institutions and transparent procedures.

The European Union should only regulate what is better regulated together. It needs procedures to bridge the gulf between the European decision-makers and their citizens. The aims of the Constitutional Treaty - closeness to the citizens, transparency, democratization and efficiency - remain valid. Questions concerning all citizens of Europe must be discussed by all citizens.

In view of high unemployment and low economic growth, many people are concerned about their future. Europe has to give them a true perspective. So it is right for the European Commission to focus its policy on growth and employment. If people feel that the member states of the EU give them and their children new opportunities for work and prosperity, they will embrace the European project. The European model has an indispensable social component. But its economic basis as also has to be earned.

Now, the most important task is to improve trust in European policy. We have to make sure everyone can understand the benefits of integration. We have to tell the citizens in a way they understand how the EU works, what it has achieved, where it is going and why. That is how to win the people over for the European project. Without their consent and cooperation the EU cannot consolidate, never mind develop further.

II.

These are difficult times for Europe. But there is no reason to doubt the European project. We only need recall what the European Union has brought the states and people it unites: growing prosperity and economic strength to help us shape globalization, freedom and rights in many forms and above all safety from war and oppression.

Jean-Claude Juncker, the Prime Minister of Luxembourg and outgoing President of the EU Council, noted that anyone with doubts, anyone despairing of Europe, should pay a visit to the war cemeteries. We agree full-heartedly. Peace in Europe is by no means to be taken for granted; there are enough people still with us who learnt this from bitter experience. For today's youth war between the states of the European Union is unthinkable - and rightly so. That is an invaluable achievement of European integration.

Yet we also know that our economic success is rooted in the European internal market. It brought the older member states prosperity and offers the new ones the same opportunities. We want well-functioning markets hand in hand with social justice and balance. This is the European model which can guarantee long-term prosperity to our citizens.

Only together will European nations be able to hold their own in competition and to successfully negotiate with countries like the USA, but also with China and India which have a demographic weight of 1.3 and 1.15 billion and growth rates of 9 and 8.5%. Only an economically strong Europe, united in solidarity, can shape the forces of globalization. It can give globalization the social dimension we deem necessary. Thus, we can provide a model for the whole world.

Internal market means competition and that in turn requires effort and flexibility. Fair competition also provides better products and services to consumers. There is no other way forward if we want to maintain and extend our prosperity.

The euro was another important step, also in political terms. It has made a decisive contribution to monetary stability, low interest rates, transparency, the lowering of transaction costs, the integration of financial markets and the mobility of people. The member states outside the euro zone are also benefiting.

III.

We must not squander what we have built up, rather have to keep a firm hold on our future opportunities. But to do this, we have to know what we want.

The European Union is already now much more than a free trade zone. From the beginning, it has been intended as a political project. It is a community with a common destiny sharing values and principles. They include freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law, pluralism and respect for human dignity, social justice and solidarity.

The member states of the European Union have to step up their commitment to promoting knowledge and innovation as the driving force behind long-term growth and employment and they have to work harder on structural reform. This is the only way to make their economies more dynamic.

Above all else, the EU has to speak with one voice in the world. Only then can it bring its economic and political weight to bear. Only then it can help to tackle the global problems successfully. This is what our partners in the world expect.

IV.

We should now calmly consider how we can bring the European ship back on course. Where do we need to start?

- We need a more democratic a more transparent and a more efficient EU, both in our own interest and to hold our own in globalization.
- We need procedures to involve the citizens more in the European project and make them part of its implementation and further development. Thus we should think about

ways how people in the EU can as far as possible jointly express their opinion on European matters.

- We have to cooperate more closely in questions of security and fighting terrorism as the recent terrorist attacks have demonstrated once more.
- We need greater readiness to compromise and more solidarity. This is a cornerstone of the European project and lies in the interest of all member states.
- Europe has to get ready for the future. We have to invest in Europe's strengths: in innovation, communication, education and research. We need to examine what we are paying to Brussels - and how it is spent. There has to be and therefore will be timely agreement on this.

Now we really have to use the period of reflection. We must not lose courage but show tenacity and ingenuity.

V.

The EU's "open door"- policy proved to be successful. The accession of new members has given Europe new momentum and new possibilities.

Now we have to take our time to learn to live in a Union of 25 and to experience an European identity which is based on a common history, a common culture and shared values which determine our daily life, and which define our common European space. As regards the enlargement agenda, the principle "pacta sunt servanda" must apply. What has been agreed has, of course, to be respected. Potential accession candidates need realistic perspectives, which will also create additional incentives for deeper domestic reforms and adoption of European standards. Membership criteria, including democracy, the respect of human rights and the rule of law, have equally to apply to all applicants.

In these days summer holidays have begun in many countries. Many of us will enjoy the beauties of Europe without border controls and in many cases won't even have to change money. Perhaps this provides one practical way to see how everyone can benefit from Europe.

This is something we do not want to forego. We have to seize the chance of a common and united Europe, thus living up to our responsibility for the next generations.