

ETIENNE DAVIGNON

The awakening

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*On the 60th anniversary of the signature of the Treaty of Rome, **Etienne Davignon**, President of Friends of Europe, launches an appeal for an awakening of a European ideal. A list of co-signatories can be found under the article.*



The European debate is confused, characterised by doubt, fear and disenchantment.

Now we are the rebels. We think that it is possible to remain clear-headed and not sink into pessimism. To predict the worst is not proof of wisdom. The defeatists are intelligent, proactive, those with a vision are dreamers. We reject this pretence.

Since ancient times Europe's political story has been characterised by barbaric wars that have endlessly ravaged our continent and accumulated countless victims.

For 70 years Europeans have changed the course of their history. The events that surround us bear witness to the fact that peace is only a fragile reality. There is no need to be an expert to understand this. Ensuring peace remains the primary duty of our Union.

Europeans are and will increasingly be a minority within the global population. This is the unavoidable consequence of global evolution.

A rejection of fatalism is the choice of those who believe they can shape the future. It is not our destiny to be relegated to the periphery.

Confronted with globalisation and accelerating change, people want our model of society to be preserved. The people are right; as the model of withdrawal and isolation has always failed in the past and will have no greater success this time.

People have forgotten that it is the European Union that has the best-protected citizens. It guarantees the quality of water and food; it lowers the cost of phone calls, internet access, transport and energy; it certifies the quality of new medicines. People's individual freedoms are guaranteed by our Charter of Fundamental Rights (let's not forget that in 1957, only 12 of the current member states were democracies).

Europe is the only place in the world with a social model that offers everyone education, healthcare, a minimum wage, a pension, annual leave and equality between men and women.

Of course, while the model is incontestable it is also imperfect. Too many inequalities persist. Our will to ensure social justice must be unshakeable.

The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has done well so far, holding back and challenging member states and the European Parliament by describing five options for the future.

Once their reactions have been noted, the real debate on the EU will begin. It is indispensable for the EU not to leave itself paralysed by the United Kingdom's decision to return to the open sea.

When determining our approach, we also need to nail two myths.

First, that few things are possible without treaty change – a (false) assertion behind which certain member states are hiding their reluctance to act. But all our proposals are possible under the Lisbon Treaty. The legal services of the Commission and the Council confirm this. The decisions depend only on the strength of our will.

Second, that a multi-speed Union is at odds with the very concept of the European project. More fakery. During its 60 years of existence, the obligations of the member states have never been identical. The original treaty not only allowed these variations, but structured them.

Differentiated transition periods organised these variations; lately it has been again recognised through 'opt-outs'. We are inventing nothing; we are not questioning the fundamentals; we are organising the differences – permanent or provisional, depending on the choice of member states.

The priorities

1. **The eurozone:** it has been possible, but painful, to stop the financial crisis that was born in the United States from destroying our monetary union. But reality has bitten; we need to address the fragility of our structures. The European Central Bank has done its duty. At times the Council of Ministers has revealed its weakness and had to recourse to intergovernmental procedures.

So the model must be corrected.

The Eurogroup must become a European institution responsible for all the aspects and achievements of economic and monetary union. Within the European Parliament, the parliamentarians of the eurozone countries must be able to exercise their responsibilities with respect to the deliberations of this Council.

Economic and monetary union brings rights and responsibilities that do not affect those who are not part of it. Naturally, it remains open to those who wish to join and fulfil the conditions of entry. One of the great merits of the European project was to not force the hand of any member state, but no member state has the right to hold back the others from progressing.

2. **Protection:** the single market must be protected. Its attractiveness gives the EU the necessary weight in all negotiations to protect its fundamental interests.

On security, the terrorist threat can be countered only through a four-pillar strategy:

- a) Exemplary and efficient collaboration at the levels of intelligence agencies, police and the judiciary;
- b) External border controls – an unavoidable necessity to ensure that the free movement of people (in the Schengen area) is possible. The means must correspond to the increased challenge, and a merciless fight against human smuggling must be undertaken;
- c) For those who come to Europe, absolute respect for our fundamental values is a necessity. But of course this implies that all the member states respect our Charter of Fundamental Rights, a common good of the Union, and that breaches are sanctioned in the same way as other violations of the treaties;
- d) The EU must participate in resolving conflicts that lead to an exodus of refugees and radicalisation. It is useful to take part in coalitions that work to eradicate terrorism, but it is not enough: the EU must be part of the political dialogue about the future of our neighbouring countries.

The EU must continue to give aid to countries affected by these conflicts through its development aid policies so that they succeed in overcoming the economic and financial consequences of war at their borders.

3. **Migration policies:** it is right to establish a clear distinction between the victims of conflicts and those who want to settle in the EU. Not to make a difference between the victims of civil war and the perpetrators is scandalous. The main objective remains to replace illegal migration with legal and organised migration.

4. **Defence:** independence demands military capacity. Current circumstances require the materialisation of this aspiration, which could not become reality with the rejection of the European Defence Community. It is not necessary to draft a new treaty, but to insert this dimension into the current EU structures. The Lisbon Treaty allows this.

5. **Growth:** disenchantment with Europe coincided with a fall in growth. We need a boost in investment and reinforce the Juncker plan, and the time has come to distinguish in member state budgets the measures that contribute to growth, and prioritise them. Without this, formal budget orthodoxy risks becoming a liability.

6. **Young people:** mutual recognition of diplomas and the Erasmus scheme have made Europe a unique platform for the younger generations. We must continue in this way by achieving the same equivalences and the same exchanges for technical training and apprenticeships, strengthening the link between companies and educators.

7. **The environment:** The protection of our environment and sustainable development is the challenge of the century. Can we imagine that it is possible to address this issue successfully outside of the EU?

8. **Innovation:** the concerns of the British scientists obviously show the added value of European policies for research.

The conclusion is simple. Without Europe, our future is dark.

Our leaders must realise that today they are the authors of what will be our history tomorrow. We cannot limit ourselves to being the managers of the present.

We need to set out a perspective that will direct strategy and action. Priorities are only defined in relation to objectives. We only enjoy a fair wind if we know the port we want to reach.

Let us dare to take pride in what we have already accomplished, have enough clear-headedness to correct our mistakes, and reinforce our solidarity, without which there is no common future.

These are our beliefs.

SIGNATORIES OF THE APPEAL

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* EYL = European Young Leader

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