

Brussels, 2 May 2014

## Conference on Europe

### IS IT POSSIBLE TO MAKE A NEW START?

#### My personal experience

Milan, 9 April 2014

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1. I should like to thank Roberto Fontolan for his introductory remarks and Don Julián Carrón for inviting me to attend this conference, which for me also presents a challenge as well as an opportunity to reflect on the reasons for the European project, on my own personal experiences and on a number of questions set out in the introduction and in the leaflet.

#### **2. Through their eyes**

I shall begin with the original architects of European unification, since I do not believe it possible to comprehend Europe except through the eyes of those who originally came up with the idea and sought to make it reality.

Jean Monnet, one of the principal founders, states in his memoirs that, when he left for his first journey abroad, his father told him *'Do not take any books; nobody can think for you. Look out of the window. Talk to people. Take notice of the person next to you.'*<sup>2</sup> I also believe that European insight is acquired first and foremost **through careful observation of reality**, untainted by prejudice. According to Hannah Arendt<sup>3</sup>, 'prejudice is an obstacle to genuine experience of the present', which is exactly what the founders of Europe were seeking to embrace by rising to the challenges then facing them with courage and objectivity.

Jean Monnet and the other EU founding fathers succeeded in combining vision with realism. It was their personal take on reality that enabled them to perceive an opportunity for good

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<sup>1</sup> The content of this speech and the views expressed therein are the responsibility of the author alone.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Monnet, *Mémoires*, ed. Fayard p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Arendt, *What is Politics?* Italian translation M.Bistolfi 1997, p.14.

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emerging from the tragic shadows of a devastating war. The peoples of Europe undoubtedly shared a common cultural tradition rooted in Christian, humanist and rationalist-inspired schools of thought.<sup>1</sup> While it is now fashionable to give the Enlightenment credit for this, the essential principles of human dignity, freedom, responsibility and the separation between politics and religion, that have undoubtedly also been grafted onto other cultural experiences, are nevertheless first and foremost rooted in the Christian experience. However, not even this could alter the fact that the European continent had hitherto been defined above all by war. The new departure essentially consisted of a different view of reality and a different way of looking at each other.

Schuman, Adenauer and De Gasperi were also aware of the transcendental nature of their mission, prompting De Gasperi to observe that: *‘We do not have the right to despair of man, individually or collectively; we do not have the right to despair of history because God is working not only within the individual conscience but also in the life of peoples’.*<sup>2</sup> It was also a process to be achieved in stages through the progressive achievement of integration: *‘Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity’* (Robert Schuman).

### **3. Europe: unity in diversity**

The European Union originated as a grand design to achieve peace, producing an original template for **unity in diversity** among its peoples. This has culminated in the creation of a market of 500 million governed by the free movement of persons, goods and services, in which all individuals enjoy the right to travel, study and work in other countries without impediment. It has led to the adoption of cohesion and regional development policies, an environmentally sustainable growth model and international relations based on cooperation and development aid. Let us not forget that Europe is the largest development aid donor in the world. The Union is also based on the rule of law, with a Charter of Fundamental Rights

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<sup>1</sup> ‘European culture was born of the meeting between Jerusalem, Athens and Rome, between Israel’s faith in God, Greek religious philosophy and Roman legal theory. The meeting of these three is what has given Europe its own particular identity’. (Benedict XVI, speech to Bundestag, Berlin, 22 September 2011).

<sup>2</sup> The Foundations of Democracy: speech by Alcide de Gasperi at the Brussels Conference (Brussels, 20 November 1948).

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enshrined in the Treaties and upholding human rights, freedom, democracy and equality. The principles embodied in the Charter also include freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

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#### **4. A journey to Berlin**

One view, possibly shared by many of those present here today, particularly younger participants who were not even born when all this was taking place, might be that such achievements can now be taken as read. Many of them, for example freedom of movement in the European Union or the Schengen Area, or a common currency, are now a part of our everyday lives. However, it is sufficient to take a few small steps back in time or indeed space to appreciate that such things can by no means be taken for granted. My experiences at the beginning of the 1980s as a young Commission trainee on my first journey to East Berlin made a lasting impression on me: the Wall dividing Germany, the Iron Curtain splitting Europe into two, the blatant injustice of a system in which promises of happiness had been forgotten and humiliating border checks were the reality. Books we needed for our studies were considered propaganda and accordingly confiscated at one of the checkpoints. This experience thus helped give me a clearer understanding and appreciation of Europe, as well as opening my eyes towards other European peoples. I subsequently had the opportunity to visit other Central and Eastern European countries before 1989 and realised that they had a number of points in common, including a natural desire to be included in the grand project for European unification. Notwithstanding their rich and diverse traditions, their cultural roots were closely intertwined, as was their shared desire for happiness, which had been merely dulled by their authoritarian regimes. Against such a backdrop, the historic accession of these countries to the European Union following the dismantling of the Wall and the Iron Curtain, ten in 2004 and a further two in 2007, seems to me all the more extraordinary.

#### **5. Good has been achieved but not irreversibly**

European unification is not irreversible. As numerous difficulties arise, inward-looking and protectionist ideas frequently take hold regarding not only the single currency but also the free movement of persons within the Schengen Area and immigration policy. In this respect there is a need for greater solidarity between European countries with regard to Member States such as Italy, for example, which is having to deal with humanitarian emergencies on a massive scale in Lampedusa. The abolition of internal borders between Union Member States in fact means shared responsibility for maintaining external borders and for the resulting humanitarian issues also. Neither is peace an irreversible achievement: witness the recent events in Crimea or the recent Balkan wars of the 1990s marked by atrocities, massacres and

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accompanying ethnic cleansing. All this serves to remind us that peaceful coexistence and reasonable debate cannot be taken for granted, particularly in the absence of any overarching federal peace project such as the European Union.

## **6. The crisis facing the European project**

While the history of the European Union undeniably makes for pleasant reading in the main, Commission President Barroso recently pointed out in launching a campaign for dialogue with the citizens of the 28 Member States that *'we cannot linger over the opening pages of our narrative, even if they are the most agreeable, but must continue to write the book in the present and the future.'* Public disaffection with Europe and the European project is now starting to make itself apparent, even in traditionally pro-European Member States'. Recent Eurobarometer<sup>1</sup> surveys have revealed 47% of respondents to be dissatisfied with the functioning of the European Union, sometimes questioning the project itself. Notwithstanding the considerable achievements of the European Union, it is no longer possible to detect the rush of idealism, the passionate support or the sense of involvement which unlocked such energies in the past. Public opinion has become more removed from a Europe which is perceived as highly technocratic, excessively bureaucratic and governed by opaque decision-making mechanisms. I therefore think that it is important to examine the reasons for this malaise, focusing on a number of factors in particular.

## **7. Effect of the economic crisis**

One of the main contributory factors to this loss of confidence has undoubtedly been the economic crisis, which has had a severe impact on the lives of many EU citizens. Everyone knows the immediate causes of the financial crisis, which began in September 2008 with the bankruptcy of the Lehman Brothers Bank and the sovereign debt crisis.<sup>2</sup> The crisis has highlighted two things: the inability of European democracies to internalise, and accommodate the effects of, the **interdependence** arising from the euro (and the euro clearly was creating very strong interdependencies among the various countries concerned) and the **original shortcoming** in the single currency itself of its being created without sufficient

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<sup>1</sup> Special Eurobarometer 413, Future of Europe, p. 7, March 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Special Committee on the Financial, Economic and Social Crisis - European Parliament, 2011.

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economic, tax and labour market integration. It is not true that market forces resolve everything, as some people mistakenly claimed over that period, and relying on the markets alone delivered Europe into the hands of speculators. In truth, though, the economic crisis has highlighted another, more deep-seated factor, which is of an **existential, moral and spiritual** nature. This is the distorted manner of viewing the economy that has made it an end rather than a means, and which has given rise to the speculation with which we are so familiar. Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical letter was referring precisely to that tendency when he said that: *‘Economy and finance, as instruments, can be used badly when those at the helm are motivated by purely selfish ends. Instruments that are good in themselves can thereby be transformed into harmful ones. But it is man's darkened reason that produces these consequences, not the instrument per se. Therefore it is not the instrument that must be called to account, but **individuals, their moral conscience and their personal and social responsibility.**’* (‘Caritas in Veritate’ encyclical letter, Chapter III paragraph 36). These are the issues at stake and this is the outlook that we have to restore.

## **8. The economic crisis and the crisis of legitimacy**

The economic crisis has seen various bodies – from the EU Council to the governments and the European Commission, Parliament and Central Bank – getting involved in order to immediately defuse this speculative spiral, establish a regulatory and supervisory framework for financial services and lay the foundations for a new form of economic governance. However, the ways in which Europe has intervened have also raised doubts over the **democratic legitimacy** of decisions that have often been taken inter-governmentally and outside any form of parliamentary control especially in the case of those countries worst affected by the crisis and its consequences. I am referring specifically to the memorandum of understanding concluded by the so-called ‘Troika’ consisting of the Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund with countries in financial difficulty<sup>1</sup> (Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Cyprus), on which the European Parliament recently gave its opinion and called by a large majority for greater transparency in the way the Troika operates and for it to be subject to democratic scrutiny by the public, via their democratically-elected representatives. In several surveys conducted by the EU institutions, the European public

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themselves have also pointed to the need for greater clarity in decision-making mechanisms and for democratic legitimacy.

## 9. Europe, nation states and subsidiarity

Thirdly, attempts are frequently made to blame Europe in general for problems and contradictions really caused within the Member States themselves, particularly regarding the hesitation and dissonance characterising foreign policy, concerning which, notwithstanding the Lisbon Treaty, coherent European action depends on the individual Member States. Moments of crisis once more revive the debate over European integration as opposed to the system of nation states, with the suggestion perhaps that certain competencies should be returned to the latter. Those who spark that debate may fail to realise that the **Westphalian model of the state**, which dates back to 1648 and sees states as internally homogenous entities externally independent of one another, is long outdated. It is important to remember that we are now living in a **multipolar**, globalised and interconnected world with **multi-level governance** in which, for some time, political power has not resided with states as individual entities. That power is now distributed along a vertical scale, ranging from the local level to the regional, national, continental and finally global levels.<sup>2</sup> The ‘intermediate bodies’ have a major role to play in this connection. As such, **European integration** – and it is important to stress this – is not only compatible with, but **must also draw on, the active contribution of movements, associations, cooperatives and voluntary bodies and give these free rein, while abandoning** any claim to fulfilling every type of aspiration that mankind or individuals may have.

I would like to quote another date. A study produced by Parliament on Europe in 2025<sup>3</sup> (and beyond, with that date being purely approximate) has shown that, based on social, economic and demographic statistics, no European country will be in a position in the years to come to

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<sup>1</sup> By virtue of this memorandum, a Member State undertakes to carry out a number of precise actions in exchange for financial assistance - European Parliament Resolution A7-0149/2014 of 13 March 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the ‘Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa Group’: ‘Completing the Euro, a road map towards fiscal union in Europe’, p. 9, June 2012.

<sup>3</sup> ‘The European Parliament 2025, Preparing for complexity’, Chapter I – Multi-Polar Context, Secretary-General of the European Parliament, January 2012.

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stand toe-to-toe with other continental powers such as the United States, China, India or even Brazil, on its own.

The statistics give food for thought. Demographically, Europe is home to just 7% of the world's population, compared with 50% for Asian countries; in Europe, young people under the age of 25 constitute 27% of the population, whereas this is 49% in India, 47% in Indonesia and 36% in China. Europe is also hugely energy dependent: 60% of its gas and oil supplies come from sensitive regions such as Russia, the Middle East and Africa. Even countries considered prosperous like Germany and the United Kingdom would rank just fifth, sixth or seventh in the world based on economic parameters such as growth and gross domestic product. It has been pointed out that, come 2030, there may well be very few European countries in the G8 if we continue at the present rate. It is only **as the European Union** that we are managing to hold onto **a leading position**, including in respect of the United States. However, EU economic influence must not be an end in itself. It should serve precisely to safeguard a certain kind of society and a certain vision of mankind that is based on respect for the individual and respect for freedom, in Europe and elsewhere.

#### **10. The cost of Non-Europe**

We often talk about the cost of Europe. The statistics on the actual cost of the European Union are quite clear, immediately visible and transparent. The EU budget totals just 1% of the combined GDP of the Member States and covers a wide range of measures and programmes.<sup>1</sup> However, we do not mention a far more important set of statistics, which is the **cost of Non-Europe**, of there not being a European Union. I believe that we should explain to the public what the added value of European action is when the situation so justifies – which is not always the case, plus which the European Union operates within the framework of a strict subsidiarity principle. To lend transparency to this debate, the European Parliament has therefore, on the basis of objective scientific data, devised means of putting a value on the cost of there being no EU action or added value in various fields. The statistics one could

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<sup>1</sup> A comparative study by the European Parliament 'Parliamentary democracy in action – functions and expenditures' (Cabinet of the Secretary General, March 2013) compared the annual per capita cost in euros of the European Parliament and a number of national parliaments. It was revealed that the European Parliament cost EUR 3.10 per capita, compared with EUR 8.20 for the Bundestag, 8.10 for the French National Assembly, or 7.30 for the British House of Commons.



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quote include the cost to Europe of not having a single digital market, the completion of which is estimated to be worth EUR 260 billion, and the impact of completing the single market for consumers, the value of which has been estimated at around EUR 235 billion, while having an integrated energy market is said to have enabled a saving of at least EUR 50 billion, etc. This survey shows that the absence of European integration in various sectors would cost EUR 800 billion.<sup>1</sup> The absence of a European Union would not just mean countries duplicating tasks but would also result in a lack of efficiency, in cases where implementing joint policies and measures – which often already exist on paper – could generate major economies of scale.

## 11. Bureaucratic sideslip

One of the frequent criticisms of the European Union relates to its technocratic bureaucracy: blanket attacks are often launched on ‘those technocrats in Brussels’ who, it is claimed, are the source of so many of society’s problems. It would be good to shed a little light on this too. Jean Monnet said that *‘Nothing is possible without men and women, but nothing is lasting without institutions’*.<sup>1</sup> However, it is important for those institutions to remain a tool for implementing the project, rather than becoming an end unto themselves. When we talk about institutions, bureaucracy and structures, two concepts spring to mind: one is the **mission** of the EU institutions, which should never be lost from sight, because the EU institutions and the structures for which they are responsible are part of a great project for peace and liberty. The other is a **spirit of service**: service to society and service to the public. I would like to remind you of what **Václav Havel** said about this on visiting the European Parliament in 1994: *‘I felt I was looking into the inner workings of an absolutely perfect and immensely ingenious modern machine. To study such a machine must be a great joy to an admirer of technical inventions, but for me, whose interest in the world is not satisfied by admiration for well-oiled machines, something was seriously missing, something that could be called, in a rather simplified way, a spiritual or moral or emotional dimension. The treaty addressed my reason, but not my heart.’* I believe that Europe and its institutions should indeed look more to the public’s heart.

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<sup>1</sup> Mapping the cost of non-Europe, 2014-2019 (author: Joseph Dunne, European Added Value Unit of the European Parliamentary Research Service).

## 12. The forthcoming EU elections

I should now like to talk briefly about the elections to the European Parliament, to be held on 25 May, to which Roberto Fontolan previously referred. The European Parliament is the only EU institution directly elected by EU citizens. These elections are very important for a number of reasons, one of which is the growing role of the European Parliament as an EU legislator. Parliament is responsible for the joint adoption, together with the Council of the EU, of laws that apply to **507 million Europeans** in accordance with the fundamental principle of subsidiarity, in areas that are extremely important for EU citizens (such as the economy, culture, food safety, research, industrial policy, economic and social cohesion, the environment, transport safety, civil liberties and immigration). Parliament is, together with the Council of the EU, the budgetary authority and is also responsible for the **ratification of all the main international treaties** concluded by the European Union – the upcoming **TTIP**, for example (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the United States). Even more important, Parliament is the institution responsible for exercising democratic scrutiny over decisions taken at EU level, also because Parliament has the power to **appoint** the European Commission and **exercise democratic scrutiny** over the working thereof (it can also dismiss the Commission with a vote of censure if there is no longer a relationship of trust between the two). Often, the response to many criticisms regarding the transparency and accountability of the institutions, and the lack of clarity with which certain decisions are taken, can be found in the important role of scrutiny exercised by the European Parliament and its connection with EU citizens.

During its current term, Parliament has adopted 952 legislative acts concerning an extensive range of proposals regarding, for instance, how to combat the economic crisis, where it has often upheld the concerns of citizens and sought to promote measures to boost growth and employment, in addition to the policy of austerity. It has sometimes also discussed controversial issues in Europe, for example, whether investments designed to create jobs should be exempt from the rules relating to financial discipline contained in the Stability and Growth Pact. In the recent negotiations with government representatives on the **banking**

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Monnet, Mémoires.

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**union**, Parliament played a vital role in **breaking the vicious circle between the banking crisis and sovereign debt** and establishing a credible and independent system of supervision, resolution and recovery of failing banks, with one goal: that of putting the financial sector at the service of growth and the economy, and preventing the cost of bank recovery from having an impact on taxpayers and on EU citizens.

Among the various projects in which Parliament has been involved I should like to draw attention to: the **ERASMUS** programme, which, with its increased funding of EUR 14 million, will enable **five million** young people to study in the EU; the Youth Guarantee, to provide a first job for young people under the age of 25; and the **Horizon 2020** programme, which will be the largest research and innovation programme, covering a period of seven years, which also gives priority to **small and medium-sized businesses**.

Lastly, at a time of crisis in which, according to data from 2011, about a quarter of all Europeans (120 million) are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, Parliament fought vigorously against the initial proposal of the Member States, in order to restore the EUR 3.5 billion in funding from the **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived** which, through the extraordinary solidarity network of **food banks**, enables the needs of millions of citizens to be met. Last but not least, in view of the growing need for transparency in EU decision-making, it is worth remembering that Parliament – unlike other EU institutions – discusses and deliberates in public, and that all of its meetings, from parliamentary committee meetings to hearings, are streamed online. This means that every citizen, at any time, can follow what is going on in the European Parliament in their own language.

But there is another even more important and immediate reason why the European elections could be different this time – and that is, the **election of the President of the European Commission** and the Commission as a whole. Under the Treaty of Lisbon, in designating a candidate for President of the European Commission, the European Council – the assembly of heads of state and government of the EU Member States – must take into account the outcome of the European Parliament elections. The candidate for this important post is proposed by the European Council but elected by the European Parliament, which also gives its vote of approval to the Commission as a whole. However, in order to give real substance to this arrangement, the main European political ‘families’ have nominated candidates for President

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of the Commission, from whom the presidential candidate should be chosen according to the outcome of the elections, precisely with the aim of establishing that **genuine opportunity for European political debate** that has been lacking in recent years. Five political families, the European People's Party, the Socialist Party, the Liberals, the Greens and the European Left have nominated their candidates who, right now, are debating in public their programmes and their visions of Europe.

In this regard, during his recent visit to the European Parliament to commemorate the 30-year anniversary of Altiero Spinelli's constitutional treaty,<sup>1</sup> President Giorgio Napolitano recounted how, one day, a convinced europhile asked Spinelli: 'But when can we truly say that the construction of a united Europe has reached the point of no return?' The answer to that question was: 'When the struggle for power in Europe has at last become political.' And that is what, to some extent, we want to do here: to make the European elections not into an extension of national policy issues but into an ideal opportunity to launch a wide-ranging debate on European issues, thus enabling citizens to decide also who will lead Europe's destinies in the future.

Drawing towards my conclusion, I should like to say that in the course of its evolution, the European project has always been based on certain strengths, initially represented by reconciliation between peoples and the preservation of peace; at the end of the 1990s the determining factor was the historic reunification of Europe, culminating in its enlargement, which brought 100 million citizens of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe into the European Union.

Jean Monnet considered that *'everything is a means, even the obstacles'* and today the current crisis may provide an opportunity for the rebirth of the European project.

The economic crisis and the **challenge of globalisation** may be an opportunity to rediscover a new role for Europe, one which goes beyond mere general economic convenience and focuses

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<sup>1</sup> Draft Treaty Establishing the European Union adopted by European Parliament resolution of 14 February 1984.

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on the recovery of **human beings and the value of the individual**<sup>1</sup>; placing the individual at the centre of globalisation and the European identity may represent the new mission of Europe today.

During a recent visit to the Brazilian Parliament, in the futuristic building designed by Oscar Niemeyer, I was struck by a sentence uttered by Ulysses Guimarães, one of the leaders of the democratic struggle in contemporary Brazil. Commenting on the challenges of that great country, he stated that: ‘*Gobernar è encurtar as distancias*’ (to govern means to shorten distances). I asked myself whether this is not also the task of the European Union and its institutions – to shorten the distances between the EU and its citizens, between the centre and periphery of Europe, to bridge the gap that separates us from the ‘peripheries of existence’.

I should now like to conclude by saying that Europe, like the whole of life itself, is a major challenge, in which our freedom is at stake.

With all the difficulties faced by the European project today, and the perception of a technocratic, self-referential Europe, I believe that a different Europe is not only possible but vital in order for the European integration process to be able to regain its vitality and charm and to preserve our civilisation from soulless globalisation.

I would also add that disengagement is not the answer when it comes to all the misunderstandings and frustrations that have arisen around Europe; on the contrary, that would merely promote the kind of Europe we do not want – a relativist cultural approach remote from the individual is the antithesis of the European project. The revival of Europe, on the other hand, will depend on the rediscovery of a coexistence based on joint concern for the truth in an arena from which the challenges of freedom cannot be excluded.

Lastly, to strive towards a European renaissance, using all the tools at our disposal, starting with the elections to the European Parliament, is not only a reasonable course of action but, in

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<sup>1</sup> ‘I think of a Europe where the great achievements of science, economics and social welfare do not direct themselves at senseless consumerism, but stand in the service of every person in need...’ (address by Pope John Paul II upon being awarded the Charlemagne Prize on 24 March 2004).

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the words of Vaclav Havel, *'an attempt to regain control over our own sense of responsibility. In other words, it is clearly a moral act.'*<sup>1</sup>

Thank you for your attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Václav Havel: 'The Power of the Powerless'.