

Your Europe - Your Future
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People like great moments in history. And everyone likes them to be surrounded by drama, flashlights and heavy rain and in the end the hero survives. The process that led to the signing of the treaty of Rome was almost ineffably mundane - a series of long meetings between long-since forgotten bureaucrats in rooms full of smoke.

There is much less smoke today for sure, but again, everyone seems to ask for heroes. But Europe already is a hero in many ways, the quiet glory of the post-national, post-modern entity is not the glory of a beautiful, vigorous, flag-waving hero.

So does the EU need a new narrative? I believe it does not, it does not need new heroes or values, and it will always remain an unfinished story... and we, the young people of Europe, are the ones to write the next and crucial chapter of this tale. Effectively addressing the questions raised at this Youth Summit is vital for the healthy democratic life of our continent in the next 50 years.

How shall we deal with the popular disenchantment with the EU?

Youth organisations play a key role in reducing the gap between where decisions about society are made and where they are implemented. We do this by being there both when decisions are made and when they are carried out. We are engaged in opening up political processes at all levels, and making them accessible to young people. Our wish and ability is to contribute with a spirit of enquiry, new thinking and competence. This was clearly shown through the tremendous job of National Youth Council when organising the national debates and consultations. National Youth Councils have proved to be reliable partners to the European institutions.

The Spring Summit of the Heads of State and Government conclusions just two weeks ago highlighted "the importance of a stronger sense of ownership of the Lisbon Strategy by civil society, social partners, regions and local authorities." This means, that the conclusions that we will come up with here - have to be taken into account and not just seen as mere protocol demands.

Europe is already excellent in giving glorious statements of intent, but often fails to deliver practical steps to achieve them. Europeans seem to have a bad habit of missing their own targets. This mismatch has to be altered.

We call on politicians to be accountable and we want to see a strong European Parliament, as the EU elected body that has legitimacy as the natural conduit connecting citizens to the European Union. Most of today's leaders spend more time attacking Brussels than acknowledging the EU's achievements. This is despite the fact that it is the national governments that make legislation through the senior law making body the Council of Ministers.

Is the Future of Europe really all about resuscitating the Constitutional Treaty?

Indeed the feeling of unfinished business haunts everything else that the EU does, but claims that since 2005 the EU has been unable to function seem overblown. The Prime Minister of Luxemburg, Jean Claude Juncker said once "we all know what to do, we just don't know how to get re-elected after we've done it". Does this mean that leaders like Tony Blair and Jacques Chirac are planning to surprise us in Berlin and unveil the solution tomorrow, since they are not aiming at re-election? I am curious, I have to admit.

Is there a Future for a Common Foreign Policy?

Despite being the world's biggest aid donor, enlargement has been the single most important goal of the Common Foreign Policy of the EU. From reinforcing young and fragile democracies in Greece, Portugal and Spain, to championing major economic and civic rights developments in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover enlargement prospects function as a carrot for further stabilisation and consolidation of democracy of the western Balkans.

The EU remains a dream of peace, guaranteed Human Rights and prosperity to many of our neighbours.

So is it time to define the boundaries of the EU? Or does the nervousness about enlargement reflect the failure on the part of the EU leadership to explain the benefits of an expanding EU? Populist rejection of enlargement jeopardizes the most precious achievement of the European Union: stabilizing, and further reforming and democratizing its current and future member states, as it has successfully achieved throughout its history.

Most citizens identify the state as a means of collective security against the perils of globalisation and social turmoil. The European Social Model serves as a metaphor for the challenges Europe faces on how to ensure solidarity, justice and equality for all. A first and important step must be the monitoring and enforcement of existing EU legislation.

Moreover, the Common Agricultural Policy requires further reform. This is not only indispensable for larger investment in education, research and development but it must also be the basis for fair trade relations and development cooperation with other world regions.

The Europe of the future should be about solving global problems by pooling sovereignty and setting up a framework of mutually accepted rules.

However, in the current political environment, the dominant theme in political discourse is security. Political ideologies provide different explanations on what the sources of insecurity are, as well as how to provide protection against it. Insecurity may span from economic to social and even cultural fears.

As immigration is seen as a growing threat to economic stability and security, parties from both the right and the left have toughened immigration laws radically. This crackdown on immigrants is probably the most appalling and shameful of the

European policies of recent years. We need to set straight cause and effect: It is the police violence and disfranchisement of immigrants that create criminality and deteriorate job markets. Destabilisation through immigration is not a sign that rules are not tough enough, but rather that immigration policies have failed.

Europe is facing demographic challenges, in an ever more ageing population; our continent has to turn to immigration to help replenish the shrinking workforce, without forcing people into illegal and shadow markets.

What is the role of young people in the European story today?

We are said to be the

- Generation Erasmus - travelling from Skellefteå to Palermo without a passport.
- Generation iPod - we are supposed to be apathetic and hedonist.
- Generation Internship -well-educated graduates that increasingly accept unpaid jobs in the quest for elusive permanent posts.
- Generation precarious -we have to accept all kinds of doubtful work contracts, before we get genuine social security.
- Generation Baby losers - in clear contrast to the baby boomers.
- Generation hotel mama - as spiralling property prices and poor job prospects are conspiring to keep us living with our parents.
- Generation boomerang -after study periods abroad, a traineeship here and a freelance contract there we are too often thrown back and obliged to start again from scratch.

This just describes the situation of those who can afford iPods, who have access to education systems and enjoy the privilege of being highly mobile. However, there are also many young people who do not have these opportunities and who have been failed by our education systems. Defining fundamental rights is imperative for those young people with fewer opportunities to support their efforts to overcome the legacy of discouraging experiences.

There are indeed many crucial questions to find answers to.

Will Europe be able to find the right path between the free market and social as well as environmental protection? Between the need for security and the compliance with Human Rights?

Will the Europe of the next 50 years manage to be diverse rather than uniform, a group that emphasises community relationships and responsibility over individual benefits, that celebrates cultural diversity rather than assimilation, that aims at a genuine quality of life for all over the accumulation of wealth for few, a Europe that will stand for sustainable development?

Will Europe be able to deliver more than just beautiful declarations or lengthy treaties?

The EU does not need a new narrative or new heroes. It needs to stop moaning and ensure politics addresses the real needs of its citizens and it needs to recognise the many experts it already has, who are ready to contribute and value them through

meaningful civil society involvement. The EU needs to listen to its citizens and in particular its young citizens. We are definitely ready to contribute to this chapter of the tale.