

Why Europe is Necessary

We live in a world full of dangers. This situation is a familiar one. Yet the last century ended in the hope of a more peaceful era that would see the disappearance of the antagonistic blocs. In November 1989, many of us celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall. But hope has turned to despair. In its 4/5 February issue, the newspaper *Le Monde* evokes “walls that divide the planet”, between the United States and Mexico, between Europe and Africa in the Spanish enclave of Melilla, along the border between Hungary and Serbia, the “safety barrier” between Israel and the West Bank, and of course the “world’s most heavily-armed border” between North and South Korea.

The rise in **nationalism** and **protectionism** is happening all over the world, including Europe, the United States, Russia, and Asia.

As a result, we are witnessing a breakdown in **multilateralism**, the resolving of international problems through collective negotiation rather than the unilateral use of force. Indeed, the United Nations Security Council is frequently paralysed by the veto powers of some of its permanent members and its reform is impeded. The mechanisms of the World Trade Organization often meet with failure as they are bypassed by bilateral agreements. UNESCO has been weakened by the US withdrawal, and international criminal justice is now being challenged. The success of initiatives such as UNAIDS is not enough to restore the balance.

Terrorism in its most barbaric form is being fuelled by religious **fanaticism** and, above all, Islamist Salafism, to such an extent that we can now talk of confrontation between the **Islam of Darkness**, present in several parts of the world, and the **Islam of Light** which has yet to be accomplished.

Another modern threat is **nuclear proliferation** that we fail to control, as in North Korea, or have trouble anticipating, in Iran for example.

On top of this, there are regional crises of varying degrees of intensity, such as the Near- and Middle-East chaos to which we see no end.

The military budgets of nations - great and small - are increasing sharply and steadily and the term “war” is mentioned in speeches with growing frequency.

Deep in the minds of populations, this is **fallout from globalisation** which they see as a threat to their identity and the cause of increasing inequalities. They reject the notion of building a global village and take refuge in their individual homelands.

Catalonia and Corsica are examples.

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If we look at **medium-term** prospects, we struggle to see light at the end of the tunnel. We are faced with enormous challenges.

Firstly, it is predicted that exponential **population growth** will result in a world population of more than 11 billion human beings by the end of this century (UN **median** variant). A planet inhabited by 11 billion individuals will look nothing like the Earth of our predecessors who numbered a mere billion in the mid-19th century. What

about Africa with its population of 4 billion, including Nigeria's predicted 440 million inhabitants by 2050 and more than 900 million by 2100 (again, according to the UN median variant)? In 2050, half of all Africans will be less than 25 years old and Europeans will represent 7% of world population, compared with 25% in 1900.

Then there is the **environmental** challenge. The solemn warning to humanity iterated by 15,000 scientists last November made the headlines for only a few hours. We have failed to adopt the necessary means to fight against climate change, protect biodiversity and preserve rare resources. Yet solutions do exist.

The **digital revolution** is a growing **challenge** which, combined with progress in nano-technologies, bio-technologies and cognitive sciences, promises enormous benefits in terms of health, for example, but also major risks for individual freedom and employment.

There is even an **anthropological challenge**; while artificial intelligence can serve humanity and indeed enhance our existence, it can also be detrimental to humanity if the roles are reversed.

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So, are we to succumb to pessimism?

Pessimism is in neither my nature nor my thoughts – quite the opposite! We must act because, I repeat, solutions do exist.

But we must of course think before we act.

All the issues I have just raised deserve in-depth discussion. This is the work of experts, but it is also the responsibility of citizens because the key to most of these problems lies with them; after all, it is their behaviour that will support or impede the required changes.

Allow me to tell you about an initiative I have recently taken in my city, Bordeaux.

I have invited my fellow citizens to engage in a brainstorming exercise to imagine and build together the city of tomorrow, "Bordeaux 2050". This may seem reckless. Things change so fast that looking 20 or 30 years ahead is risky and perhaps illusory.

But even if we get it wrong, we believe it could be useful to imagine different scenarios that could act as benchmarks for future measures.

Where will we live? How will we get around? What will we eat? How will we treat illness, or get training, or just enjoy ourselves? All these questions tease the imagination.

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I have left Bordeaux to further widen the field of vision.

I am convinced that the fate of humanity will depend, both globally and locally, upon the level of awareness of populations.

Populism is often criticised, and rightly so.

Populism does not respect people.

On the contrary, it is a form of contempt consisting in telling people what they want to hear, even if it is far from the truth.

Respecting the people means trusting the people and restoring confidence.

What our countries are suffering from is mistrust: citizens' mistrust of globalisation, mistrust of scientific and technological progress, and mistrust of the elite, political leaders in particular. If we fail to break down this wall of mistrust, we must fear the worst.

The problem is that there is no decree for confidence. It results from a mysterious chemistry, as we witnessed recently in France, this odd country that, according to opinion polls, is home to the most pessimistic people in Europe. Suddenly the population regained confidence, charmed by a new and, it must be said, out-of-the-ordinary President whose success delivered a devastating blow to our political landscape.

Beyond any cyclical phenomena which may or may not last, we need to act sustainably by searching for root causes.

In the majority of our countries, we can identify the same profound crisis of the very representative democracy that we took decades to build. This crisis of confidence is almost an existential one. When voters - fewer and further between - go to the polling station, they are no longer content for their vote to designate who will exercise power in their name; they now want to be stakeholders, throughout the term of office, partaking in decisions that concern them. This is the contradiction pointed out by political scientist P. Rosanvallon between the democracy of **authorisation** and the democracy of **power**.

The great artist, Michelangelo Pistoletto, whom I had the pleasure of meeting in Bordeaux for an immersion project in several districts of the city, offers roughly the same analysis but uses different words; he recommends moving from **democracy** to **demopraxy**.

This is a general, sustainable aspiration maintained by rising levels of education and information that make citizens more demanding and change their relationship with authority. We strive to integrate this into local governments, with varying degrees of success, by encouraging consultation in all its forms, including a collaborative approach to political decisions.

These new methods of exercising power remain to be transposed to major systems at national and international levels. We have the tools, both digital and conventional. This is truly a renewal of representative democracy - which is still irreplaceable - through a participative democracy which we must successfully achieve.

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The same challenge applies to Europe. One of the most frequent criticisms made about the European Union is its **democratic deficit**. Despite successive reforms that have strengthened the European Parliament's representativeness and scope of power, the Union still seems technocratic, distant and unaware of the true expectations of its citizens. Whether or not this criticism is justified makes no difference. What matters is European citizens' perception of and relationship with the EU, today tainted with a hostility towards European construction that is expressed at

the polling stations.

I firmly believe that a dismantling of the European Union would be disastrous for our countries and for the continent.

In a world full of danger, there is strength in unity. The most overused slogans are often the truest.

Yes, there is strength in unity when faced with climate change which knows no borders.

Yes, there is strength in unity when GAFAM has a hold over so many aspects of our daily lives.

Yes, there is strength in unity when it comes to managing migration flows together in a humane and responsible manner.

We can rest assured that, as stated by Alain Minc in his latest book (***Une Humble Cavalcade dans le Monde de Demain***), the European Union is “unravellable”. The complexity of the Brexit negotiations bears witness to this. Nevertheless, I believe there is a real risk of dispersion, either by sudden explosion or, as Minc himself admits, by a gradual “fading” to a standstill.

If you run into a brick wall, you fall. Such is the law of international competition. So, the only valid project for Europe is the “great leap forward”.

Emmanuel Macron followed others in setting the course during his speech at the Sorbonne on 26 September last. During his intervention at the diplomatic forum of the Körber Foundation on 5 December, Sigmar Gabriel, the German Foreign Affairs Minister, agreed with several points made by the French President.

Priorities have been identified:

Priority 1: **Euro Zone**. We need to improve governance and performance to make it not only an area of stability to protect our economies from the turbulence of exchange markets but also a zone of growth to support employment. To do so, we must provide the necessary institutional and budgetary means to rectify internal malfunctions by seeking social and fiscal convergence, and fight more effectively against the dumping practices of certain competitors.

Priority 2: **Digital**. Digital technology is completely overhauling our economies and our societies. We have the necessary **knowledge** in these domains, but we are not **applying** it. Hence, we are more and more dominated by outside players. We must urgently create the conditions that will allow European digital champions to emerge, starting with the organisation of a single market with European regulations and tax rules, to guarantee its fairness.

Priority 3: **Energy Transition**. This is the key to sustainable development on our planet. Until now, our energy choices have diverged. We must try again to find areas of agreement, for example on the right carbon cost to encourage or oblige us to change the way we live, eat and travel and to invent a new, circular growth model that is straightforward and preserves rare resources. As Europe demonstrated in the Paris Agreement negotiations, we can be at the forefront of this struggle.

Priority 4: Our **Borders**.

It is because of the observation that the Schengen area is incapable of controlling its borders that beliefs nurtured by the extreme right are able to prosper in our

democracies. This is a crucial issue and a considerable challenge. On the one hand, we must remain loyal to our moral values and international commitments by granting asylum to individuals who are persecuted for their political or religious ideas. On the other hand, as Michel Rocard once said, we cannot open up our borders to all the misery of the world.

It is essential that we act on two aspects: **control**, by providing Schengen with legal, budgetary and human resources to manage common borders properly. Progress is needed in this area. But we must also **harmonise** our asylum and immigration policies to provide a clear basis for the solidarity that unites us. Not forgetting a third aspect which is the most difficult and the most fundamental in the medium term: our handling of the deep-rooted causes and, first and foremost, the Europe-Africa partnership without which we will be powerless to control migration flow. It is difficult enough to build a wall in the Mexican desert. Building one across the Mediterranean, even if we wanted to, would be impossible.

Priority 5: **Defence.**

Let us take advantage of the situation created by BREXIT and the new American position to give decisive momentum to mutual security and defence policies; progress has been accomplished recently, for example the setting up of a permanent, structured cooperation as provided for in the treaties, or the creation of a European defence fund to finance our research capabilities. Here we have tools that can be fully appreciated only if supported by a shared vision of today's threats and of the solutions that we are determined to find. It is urgent for us to draw up a white paper on the defence of Europe and its strategic autonomy as a complement to NATO.

Priority 6: **Africa.** The destinies of Europe, the Mediterranean and Africa are closely interlinked. We cannot realistically hope for balance in population movements while it is impossible for young Africans to work and flourish "back home" as they legitimately aspire to do. Aid for development is a necessity. But what our partners really need is productive investment.

Africa needs more commitment from our businesses. It is also in the corporate interest to be present in Africa and not leave this market of 4 billion inhabitants to China, the United States, Turkey and many others. Forgive me for thinking of French businesses in particular, as I find them hesitant despite their competitive advantage of a common language with many African countries.

French-speaking countries are a matter of strategy for us in France. Multilingualism is a matter of strategy for the whole of Europe.

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So how do we make progress in all these directions? We may see clearly what needs to be done, but how do we overcome resistance or inertia?

First of all, we need the major European leaders to adapt their policies. Everybody is aware that France and Germany can, and must, be the driving force. I firmly hope that the German Government, now finally formed after the elections of last autumn, can get to work with the French Government.

We are also aware that Franco-German initiatives cannot hope to flourish if they are

not immediately proposed to our strategic partners, beginning with Italy who has been a key European member from the outset.

Another condition is that the leaders of Europe be supported by the people of Europe. To this end, in a world full of danger, it is necessary to address a new overarching issue: to convince our fellow citizens that the European Union will protect them properly.

Indeed, besides the shortfalls in democracy that have undermined faith in Europe, the Union has shown that, too often, it is inefficient and powerless.

Renovated Europe will protect us from the threat of conflict that is no longer mere theory, and against terrorism of which there is still considerable risk.

Renovated Europe will protect us from the social, environmental and fiscal dumping that undermines fair competition and free movement.

Renovated Europe will protect us from the unchecked, uncontrolled power of multinational firms which intrude on our personal lives, failing to play by the rules of regulated liberalism.

Renovated Europe will protect us from the chaotic movement of populations, human trafficking and the exploitation of misery.

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A protective Europe, but also a Europe that is a vector of common values and an architect of planetary peace.

Because the real question from which we cannot escape is this: do we truly share the same ideals?

The same political ideals:

- the ideal of **freedom** based on the free will and equality of women and men who shape our societies.
- the ideal of **justice**, solidarity, national cohesion and equal opportunities, that ensures none of our citizens fall by the wayside.
- the ideal of **democracy** renewed in the way I mentioned earlier.
- in a nutshell, the same **ideal of civilisation**.

This is not so easy any more. It must be noted that some Member States of the Union are moving away from the values we thought we all shared. Illiberal democracy is not welcome in the club named Europe. Whichever words we use - renovated Europe, "great leap forward" or reconstruction - with the sacrifices involved they only make sense if our nations, States and, above all, our fellow citizens, in all their diversity, consider themselves custodians of a shared cultural, intellectual and human heritage that they wish to pass on to future generations.

This is why education is the lever to any reconstruction.

This is why, if I were to conclude by proposing a single measure, I would choose to establish between our countries an Erasmus programme for the benefit of students, apprentices and young workers; a universal Erasmus to generate among the men and women of Europe more knowledge, mutual understanding and friendship to solidify the real Union, not that of treaties but a Union of hearts and spirits.