

Session 32 – How Will Europe Inspire the World?

Let us go back to the beginning. On August 5th 1943, in his speech to the French Committee for National Liberation, Jean Monnet declared: “There will be no peace in Europe if the States re-establish themselves on the basis of national sovereignty, with what this entails in high-profile policy and economic protection (...) European countries are too narrow to assure prosperity and indispensable social developments to their people.”

At that time, war-torn Europe was promoting the unheard of idea of a united continent that wanted to forget its terrible past and build in the most audacious way a common future. Europe’s values were stated clearly right at the beginning: open society, prosperity for all and social progress. Nationalisms that led the continent to disaster were left aside. 75 years later, where are we now? The Coal and Steel Community became the European Economic Community and then the European Union with the Euro Area at its centre. The European Union is standing strong with its population of 511 million. It is a democratic space where the Age of Enlightenment’s values are dominating: progress, freedom, solidarity and equality of rights. It is also the second global economic power with a GDP that represents more than a quarter of the world’s GDP. It is an outstanding success in many ways and has all the reasons to inspire the world. The European model remains a unique example of inter-states unions that largely surpass the only free trade frame. Its institutions form an undeniable source of inspiration regarding political stability, citizen protection, the promotion of human rights, the social model and some transfer of wealth between states.

Nevertheless, the old nationalist demons, feared by Monnet and the generations affected by the Second World War were never too far away. They regained strength due to economic vicissitudes following the economic and financial crisis of 2008-2013. They are stoked shamelessly by a collection of politicians of the extreme right and populists such as the American Donald Trump, the Hungarian Viktor Orbán, the Italian Salvini, the French Marine Le Pen, the Russian Vladimir Putin, the English Nigel Farage, the Polish Kaczynski, etc. They attack traditional media, intellectual elites, experts, academics, the judicial system and non-governmental organisations to promote their control on power and withdrawal values, often xenophobes that share similarities with the rise of fascism in the 1930s. The fact that this move towards fascism is accompanied by the rise of fake news is far from being insignificant – counterfeit news become a propaganda weapon. Like Hannah Arendt describes so well: “The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is the people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction and the distinction between true and false no longer exist.” Or : “The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instil convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any.”

Facing these adverse winds, Europe must react, build its guard and solve urgent problems that feed destructive forces that have forgotten the devastating consequences of war and the 1930s and campaign against multilateralism and open societies. Europe must urgently build a European policy of right to asylum and put into place an enlightened policy for economic migrants. It must strengthen the euro zone in order to allow it to cope in case of economic shocks. It must build its defence policy and face American threats on NATO in a context where Russia and China assert their military power. It must define a strategy for its relations with China whose geopolitical influence now extends over to Central and Southern Europe. Most importantly, Europe must once again move forward.

When we reflect on the European Union’s history and its successes, we realise how much the European voice should be strong throughout the globe and how Europe should carry with ambition new projects that will influence the future of our planet: climate change and energy transition; new technology discoveries and management; society’s progressive adaptation to new forms of work

through education, life-long learning and a more agile but protective social system. To make these goals achievable, Europe must use all its economic weight – which is large – in international negotiations so that standards, regulations, treaties and legal precedents are at least partially of European inspiration. Europe must have ambitious technological development, research and education programmes because this is the key for tomorrow's economic power. It is one of the ways by which European values will be able to persist and transform globalisation.