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EU2030: Rethinking our common priorities

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Europe is not in good shape. To embark on an enlightened renaissance of Europe, we should aim at a better balance between vision and pragmatism in our thinking and acting, and in getting people involved. We need a democratic Europe. This can only happen through closer cooperation.

This is no longer the classical and much-discussed problem of the “democratic deficit”. This is something much more serious that can threaten the survival of our European values, not only the institutions. And if our values are lost, we are lost. “User-friendliness” does not bear equal weight to the forces of populism that gain in strength exponentially. Some of us, not remembering how difficult it was to build this seemingly sturdy construction of the EU, still think that even if we poke the EU in the eye, nothing will change. That is why we so easily give in to the populist temptation.

Reforms must be implemented democratically through interaction and participation. It is however difficult to mobilise people for a grand change without a clear direction. Contrary to the views expressed by most influential politicians, I believe that having a vision is now key. Without a vision it is practically impossible to get the citizens on board, to make them enthusiastic about change. As a citizen, I want to know where we want to go and why. People in general want to know where political elites are taking them. Uncertainty leads them towards populists.

We strongly need an enlightened renaissance of people’s commitment to Europe, its common values and principles. We need a citizenry seeing the EU as a part and parcel of their own life. But the chances for this kind of a positive re-appropriation of Europe are rather limited at the moment. What we see, instead, is a negative re-appropriation by way of populist emotions unleashed all over Europe. This process has the most potency to change the Union, for worse, destroying cohesion at people to people level.

The crises have shown that for far too long, Europe's leaders have only reacted to the events taking place rather than directly confronting their root causes and being proactive. This ad hoc policy has undermined European solidarity and has created confusion, uncertainty and distrust, which has led to the rise of populists. There is a need to restore political leadership to prevent further damage.

Europe is made of its people who have needs, desires, dreams and fears. Many of these emotions cannot be met and satisfied by governments with a mindset narrowly centered on the nation-state. A politician who proposes today to solve problems related to the security of citizens at the level of the nation-state makes false promises. There are more and more cases, where a sound policy can be conducted

and responses to the challenges can be found only at the European level. Far too often we see national politicians coming to European meetings with purely national agenda, reject European solutions and on their way home complain about Europe's inaction. Many have lost capacity to think and act in a pro-European way. Lack of political cohesion must be reversed.

Differentiated integration has become a fact of life which we cannot deny. It will mean diverse benefits for citizens of the Member States and it will be national politicians who will bear political responsibility for citizens' access to benefits of integration. Common currency area is a natural core Europe. At the moment, out of the twenty-eight Member States, a considerable part, nineteen is already integrated much more than the rest. Members of eurozone have a block-wide banking supervision, and a common authority for bank resolution. They are discussing a common deposit insurance and reflecting on a budgetary capacity.

Of course, the deepening of the euro area will need to be accompanied with a strong safeguard clause to prevent discrimination against those countries that do not share the common currency.

Rules will be needed to prevent the risk of internal market fragmentation and protect the social, economic and territorial cohesion of the Union. The European Commission should be the authority in charge of upholding these principles and ensure the application of this clause.

Countries that will be out of the euro area but planning to join in the future should be given the possibility to be associated to euro area decisions if they so request, the same way as they can join the Banking Union. Common interests are easier to see within the common currency area. So this is the project to proceed with. Those political leaders who are prepared to take the risk of sticking to national sovereignty and act to "take control back" from Europe to national capitals might change their mind one day. Euro zone should remain open.

Reforms to deepen democracy in Europe, to make it inclusive and participatory are necessary. But we also need a debate on Europe, a debate which would be open to citizens and actively involve them. People want to talk about Europe, they want to discuss the different paths of integration. They want to talk to other people who have different dreams and problems. We need a talkative Europe, an interactive Europe. We need to enhance dialogue for sustainable European democracy on all levels: political, social, cultural. This is a pre-condition for making European politics and structures rooted in civil society. And this is also a path toward new European Treaty which would be designed - unlike the current Treaty - in a way providing space for democratic choices.

Problems will not go away, they will not disappear by themselves. There is a need to act, in order to avoid the risk of disintegration of the Union, which is our place on earth. Politicians must stop speaking badly of the Union for six days a week and wonder that the referendum held on the seventh day is against Europe. The disintegration of Europe would lead to its breakdown into twenty-eight States each of which will be irrelevant in a global world. Europe is the only way to ensure that globalisation can work for us. To ensure a strong position of Europe in the global

world and the effectiveness of its internal policies, greater cohesion in Europe, at the economic, social, territorial and political level is needed.