

LEADERSHIP IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY EUROPE

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In spite of the impatience of convicted Europeans and the reticence of Euro-sceptics, Europe's rapid evolution since the end of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first is objectively quantifiable.

The as-yet unfinished European executive project and, consequently, the lack of a common foreign policy, fail to hide the significant advances in the process of European convergence. We have been witnesses to a European Union that overcomes any East-West reticence with the inclusion of the majority of countries on the continent, while advancing towards a legal harmonisation and that has excelled in terms of monetary union, in spite of the current setbacks.

Nevertheless, contemporary Europe is still suffering excessive interference from its member states that continue to block the transfer of sovereignty to a continental level. Interestingly, it is the same resistance that is shown when it comes to proposing new areas of sovereignty for those nations that wish to have their own voice in Europe and speak in the first person.

This reflection is pertinent because it seems difficult to separate this situation of stalemate (in spite of the progress that has been made) from the clear lack of European political leadership. It should be clear that when we speak of European leadership we do not mean personalities or media hype. When we speak of European leadership we mean politicians that understand that the best service they can offer their compatriots involves constructing a common European identity with an authentic desire for understanding, cooperation and promotion on a continental scale.

Unfortunately, the traditional party system has not followed the dynamic evolution of recent times and continues to be tied to principles of services that are often incompatible with public service. A present day career politician does not see their career in terms of the benefits they can bring to society, but rather in terms of the benefits for their own party. The party in turn rewards the politician's loyalty with promotion.

This vicious circle complicates the presence of individuals with a high intellectual capacity from the academic



or business world, since it does not reward technical, human and professional quality, but rather a strict adherence to the party line.

The current European leaders are, therefore, hostages to a career which produces in them the vices of mistrust and egoism. Since they are incapable of building consensus and creating teams, they are in turn incapable of projecting these skills onto policies on a continental scale.

As in all generalisations, we only seek to illustrate situations that, fortunately, have notable exceptions. Here in Catalonia we can proudly name three Euro MPs who excel in their desire to serve the public and excel in their respective parliamentary groups in terms of their preparation and ability to take on work. In effect, Tremosa, Junqueras and Romeva represent the kind of European politician we are calling for and their work is a credit to their respective liberal and Greens-European Free Alliance groups.

Nevertheless, we would like to go still further. We want to speak of continental leadership, of statesmen (and stateswomen, naturally) and visionaries that have the capacity and the determination to head the European project and place it on an equal footing with the leaders from Asia and the Americas.

This leadership must exist, and national political structures, both public and private, would do well to promote it above their weak party servility. Europe needs to construct a new future. We need strong leaders who are generous and with a determination to see the job through.

From this point of view, it is easier to interpret Europe's weaknesses and also its potential, as demonstrated by the election of Herman Van Rompuy as president of the European Council and Catherine Ashton as the new foreign policy and defence chief for the European Union.