



MEETING THE CHALLENGES FACING 21ST CENTURY EUROPE

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Europe is undoubtedly experiencing moments of upheaval due to the global economic crisis. Nevertheless even amid these upheavals in the financial world we should be able to widen the perspective with which we observe our continent and look beyond what is incidental. We need to examine and take on the big challenges the new century poses for European societies. To highlight a few:

1. Europe only has a future if it goes beyond an economic collusion. In the words of George Steiner in *The Idea of Europe*, 'Europe would surely die if it didn't fight for its languages, its local traditions and its social autonomy. People forget that God is in the detail'. Monnet's old idea of a Europe that can be recognized by its diversity took over from De Gaulle's outdated vision of a Europe united by interests and divided by

its states. States that day after day prove to us they are unable to resolve issues of proximity, that are not close enough to their citizens and which simultaneously show themselves to be incapable of competing in a globalized world with major emerging states thanks to their size, demography and wealth of resources.

2. The failure of a Europe of states is a magnificent opportunity for the European nations with a history that goes beyond the one belonging to the state in which they find themselves: Catalonia, Euskadi, Flanders and Scotland are set to be future states with an internal coherence and are of the perfect size to combine balanced interior and exterior trade structures, while possessing a population size and a sufficiently powerful industrial base to become successful models of the new Europe. The Eu-

ropean community has the challenge and the opportunity to recognize and promote these new political subjects. The example shown by this successful model are the existing small and middle size states that have managed to emerge more speedily and effectively from the problems that today still threaten and affect most of Europe.

3. Europe can and should learn to understand the decisive political actors on the international scene in the twenty-first century such as Brazil, South Africa, Canada, India and China. Aside from commercial competition, which may prove tough, Europe needs to face the challenge of leading the commitment to democratic values on a global scale. Europe produces and Europe consumes, but above all, Europe is a beacon of democracy, welfare and human rights, of political and cultural diversity, and the diversity of ideas, and we need to consolidate Europe as a world leader in the twenty-first century based on these values.

4. We must meet the challenge of immigration in Europe from a firm position in defence and promotion of languages, cultures and traditions that unite each and every European society. The trap of xenophobia can be avoided through unambiguous and bold arguments that spell out both the rights and the duties of immigrants with the same vigour. Universal rights are offered with the prior assumption of the inherent duties of any European citizen. Europe has yet to see and experience a large number of waves of immigration, especially from a sub-Saharan Africa ravaged by drought and political instability, as was recently demonstrated by the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa. It must do so with clear and confident ideas as to the nature of the Europe we wish to offer and see flourish.

5. The construction of Europe must be based on serious, rigid yet reasonable criteria. The Greek debacle currently affect-

ing the continent cannot be understood as the result of short-term circumstances, when Greece thoughtlessly joined the EU in 1981. At the time the relevant criteria were not adhered to. Over the ensuing thirty years it has not proved possible to straighten out a chaotic situation that has become a burden to the whole continent. Europe needs to be built and consolidated, not broken into pieces.

6. We need to understand the profound transformation of Europe that we are experiencing. In the words of the diplomat Joan Prat, we can see how the shift from the Paris-Bonn alliance towards the Paris-Berlin alliance has moved Europe's epicentre closer to the north and more to the east. We need to understand this new map and act accordingly. Recent events make one think that perhaps Germany has the intention of returning to '*Mittleeuropa*' as the dominant player in Central Europe, turning its back on the project and the values akin to a Western Europe which is now in recession. The small nations and the European periphery must respond to this new map with more European feeling than ever, while reaffirming the need for a united Europe, convinced of its cultural and linguistic diversity.

The world is changing and Europe changes. It has to change. We are referring to a profound change, of going in search of a new liberating paradigm that will allow Europe and the Europeans to occupy the place we deserve on the international stage presented to us in the twenty-first century.

European nations, and Catalonia in particular, face both the challenge and the opportunity to participate with their own voice and in first person. It is not the time for regret. It is not even the time to complain about the many grievances that we appear to have. It is time to work with unity and the conviction for the tomorrow we wish future generations to inherit.