

Why it's worth keeping the European dream alive

Rethinking
Europe



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The attention of all of us who care about the future of Europe is inevitably focused on solutions to the eurozone debt crisis. And so every twist and turn of the debate – the foundations of our banks, the programmes for indebted states and the role of the financial facility – is, of course, centre stage. For our generation, however, and even more for those who before us helped to shape the European Community, there is something more at stake: that is the European dream.

Our common architecture of institutions, procedures and relationships has succeeded in giving Europeans what the founding fathers expected: not only peace, instead of bloody wars, but also greater prosperity for our citizens through the benefits of the common market. Decade after decade, these have been the reasons for the strengthening image of Europe.

Now a broader and deeper question has to be answered. Are we still convinced that, in the 21st century, staying together, working together and, therefore, finding common solutions to the issues before us will lead each and all of us to more prosperity? This has been the glue that has kept us together for more than 50 years and has convinced each of our national communities to accept constraints for the sake of the expected benefits. Either we still

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share that belief, or no technicality will save the indebted countries, the banks that own their bonds and, eventually, the euro and our common construction.

The harsh reality that will challenge us more and more in the years ahead is a world in which the share of prosperity we Europeans, and our US partners, will enjoy will be limited by the growth of others and might in time not allow us to preserve the standards of living most of us are used to. Can the European dream, and the European glue,

survive in such a profoundly changed context?

The rebalancing of the world's economies is not the only reason for the change. Ian Morris, the historian, in his reconstruction of more than 30,000 years of parallel history of east and west, sees possible future scenarios as different combinations of two opposite trends: technological

innovation and its benefits, on one side; the release of "five horsemen of apocalypse" on the other.

Climate change, famine, migration, disease and state failure are the five horsemen. In the course of the next few decades we might defeat them or allow them to block human development. In this respect, the limits of nation states and their jurisdictions are self-evident and the devolution of powers to supranational organisations, first

advocated by Immanuel Kant, German philosopher, is essential. The awareness of this urgent need is growing. The European Union gives organisation, procedures and rules to 27 states. In an increasingly interdependent world, its role as a prototype remains unparalleled.

Fighting the "five horsemen of apocalypse" is a good reason for the EU to exist. It is a sufficient reason to counter fear, should fear prevail and encourage our national communities to look to their own

defence and ignore that of others. But it is not the only reason for us to remain loyal to our old dream, for the EU still offers our citizens prosperity.

While the divisions between west and east and between developed and developing countries will gradually fade, linguistic and cultural clusters of collective intelligence will continue to compete in the world market. Therefore, not all of the goods and services offered in such a market will be produced anywhere in the world. The richness and linkage of Europe's culture will remain an invaluable asset to be offered to the rest of the world, not only as a heritage but as an example to be followed and also as a set of

products and services uniquely and unmistakably European. The talent of our artists, our architects, our artisans and our companies cannot easily be copied.

While coping with obstacles of a kind we never met in the past, some of us are asking ourselves if the EU does not belong to a past that is over. They are wrong. Dismantling Europe is not an option to cope better with the unknown we are starting to face. On the contrary: being freer, but also isolated and weaker, would leave each of us at the mercy of the wider world.

However, not even a veteran of EU treaty reform, as one of the authors of this article happens to be, would advise our current leaders to engage in it in the imminent future. The existing treaty offers legal bases and procedures by which the strengthened European policies that are necessary to support the single currency and promote our overall growth can be attained. On the basis of a common European vision (if we still share it), nothing more is needed.

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