



WHAT FUTURE  
FOR EUROPE?  
EUROPE IN 2014

# The Future of Europe:

## Challenges Ahead

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Europe's historical baggage:  
Berlin, Paris and London

**In the early days following the liberation of France, Jean Monnet began formulating his ideas for the future of Europe.** At a lunch hosted by General Charles de Gaulle, Monnet suggested that Europe – particularly Germany and France – must be united “on terms of equality between its members” in the form of a “single economic entity with free trade”. De Gaulle was sceptical: “after a war such as this, it is hard to see French and Germans belonging together to an economic union” (Duchêne, 1994: 127).

When relations with post-War Germany became critical, Monnet proposed a European federal authority to deal with coal and steel. This plan also had the support of the French foreign minister Robert Schuman. Schuman was quite clear in his aim; he wanted a “united Europe that would have Franco-German reconciliation at its heart” (Nugent, 2006: 36-37).

Ever since Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle signed the Elysée Treaty in 1963, Germany and France have been trying to find common ground on a number of positions. The future of Europe is one such area where both countries could not always agree on.

De Gaulle wanted a Europe of states rather than an integrated supranational Europe. He described the latter as “a myth and a fiction” but conceded that a “Europe made up of separate states will ultimately lead to a confederation”. On the other hand Germany advocated an integrated Europe. This goal was largely anchored in Germany’s bitter experience in the preceding two world wars – wars prompted by petty nationalism and the expansionist policies (Archiv der Gegenwart). De Gaulle’s resignation in 1969 prompted two significant changes. The French government softened its approach to European integration and dropped its opposition to Great Britain’s membership in the European Economic Community (Nugent, 2006:25-26).

Britain's decision to apply for membership was primarily motivated by economic considerations (Archiv der Gegenwart). Its relations with the European Economic Community and the institutions which succeeded it were not always smooth.

Margaret Thatcher's strident approach to the European Community has been a rallying point for various eurosceptics. In her keynote speech to the College of Europe, Thatcher stated: *"willing and active cooperation between independent sovereign states is the best way to build a successful European Community. To try to suppress nationhood and concentrate power at the centre of a European conglomerate would be highly damaging and would jeopardise the objectives we seek to achieve"*.

This historical resume illustrates the importance of monitoring events happening in three European capitals; Paris, Berlin and London. These centres of power are as relevant now as they were in the past.

### Institutional Reform, Parliament and Citizen Participation

The level of uncertainty in the EU is not surprising. The EU is an ambitious project and the slightest hint of crisis can have a ripple effect over the entire institutional set up.

The Reform Treaty of the European Union was ratified in order to *"promote the willingness of the political elites concerned to compromise and to increase the overall level of efficiency of the EU through suitable organisations and procedures"*. However, the treaty *"leaves completely unaffected...*

*the mentality and the participation of the populations"* (Habermas, 2009:79-80).

Habermans (2009: 80-81) describes the current way of doing politics at EU level as being *"blatantly elitist and bureaucratic"*. He provides a rather pertinent analysis: *"the political class is sending the signal that it is the privilege of the governments to decide the future destiny of Europe behind closed doors"*. Whilst acknowledging that

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the powers of the European Parliament have been extended, he warns that *"until the usual spectrum of opinions and relevant issues within the national public spheres is broadened and until the public spheres become responsive to one another, the citizens derive no benefit from a formally strengthened status of the Parliament"*.

The perceived aloofness of the European Institutions and the apparent democratic deficit at EU-level seem to be strengthening the case of the Eurosceptic camp.

### The Financial Crisis and the Euro

At the beginning of 2014, Latvia became the eighteenth member of the Eurozone. Despite the fact that the Eurozone is set to grow, its stability has been tried and tested throughout the financial crisis. The crisis has uncovered problems which are both structural and political. The search for stability and growth has so far been elusive and the challenges of integrating varied economies into a single monetary union should not be underestimated.

Habermas (2012, 120- 123) believes the Euro currency will determine the future of the





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European Union. The rescue packages devised to save the Euro differ from previous bail out packages since now the taxpayers of the Eurozone effectively "bear joint liability for the budgetary risks of each other". This situation is in itself the cause of considerable disgruntlement and uncertainty. In addition to bearing the brunt of the crisis, the taxpayers may be under the impression that they are not reaping any tangible benefits. Youth unemployment and general underemployment are widespread whilst budgetary pressures are prompting the implementation of austerity measures. The problem is also one which is present at institutional level. In Habermas words, "a common market with a partially shared currency has developed in an economic zone of

*continental proportions with a huge population, but without institutions being established at the European level capable of effectively coordinating the economic policies of the member states" (2010: 121).*

### Shared Values

The European Union has often claimed to represent "Unity in Diversity". The coupling of 'diversity' and 'unity' may sound paradoxical. Nonetheless, it seems to indicate a willingness to respect or foster a sense of unity despite the diverse cultures and identities. However, occasional references to "European values" and

"shared identities" reveal a political desire to try and define some sort of common ground.

Cardinal Ratzinger, later elected Pope Benedict XVI, addressed some of these issues in a keynote speech delivered to the Italian Senate in 2004. He defines Europe as being a "cultural and historical concept, not a continent clearly definable in geographical terms" and asks "In the violent upheavals of our time is there an identity of Europe with hopes of a future – an identity for which we can commit ourselves, heart and soul?" He challenges the "self-hate" which seems to be taking root in the West: "All it sees in its own history is what is disgraceful and destructive, while it no longer seems able to perceive what is great and pure".

This is indeed a widespread problem which is largely borne out of the innate guilt most European nations have developed after their colonial track record and their role in some atrocities which are still fresh in our collective imagination. Nonetheless, this "self-hate" seems to be poisoning the very future of Europe:

*"In order to survive, Europe needs a new, critical and humble acceptance of itself; but only if it really wishes to survive. The multi-culturalism now being encouraged and fostered with such passion comes across at times as mostly an abandonment and denial of what is one's own, a sort of flight from self" (Ratzinger, 2004). He adds that this multi-culturalism "cannot subsist without shared constants; without points of reference based on one's own values". Indeed, whilst fostering diversity, an exploration of shared values is essential.*

### The Challenges Ahead

In her speech in Bruges, Margaret Thatcher made a rather pertinent remark: "Europe is not the creation of the Treaty of Rome. Nor is the European idea the property of any group or institution. The European Community is one manifestation of that European identity, but it is not the only one". There must be a certain boldness and willingness to debate issues of identity and culture. Shared values based on human dignity, the rule of law and democratic governance are often presented as abstract concepts with little relevance.

One of the greatest threats for the European Union is that it develops into an organisation its citizens and the constituent member states do not want it to be. The European Union cannot be a monolithic and inward looking organisation concerned solely with self-preservation. It must be open to change and humble enough to recognise where it went wrong and where it can perform better.

Numerous campaigns have been ineffective in increasing citizen participation in the European Parliament elections, and it is highly unlikely that the European Parliament elections scheduled for June 2014 will reverse this trend.

A report by the European Policy Centre (2013), acknowledges that these elections are considered as "second-order national elections" by the voters "on account of being less important for the allocation of executive power than national electoral contests". There is a widespread belief that there is "little at stake" and voters feel somewhat freer to vote for smaller political parties. Some of these smaller parties have embraced a Eurosceptic agenda.



The challenge here is three-fold. The first challenge is to encourage citizens to cast their vote. The second challenge is to ensure that the voice of those citizens who choose not to vote is not ignored: their reluctance to vote or their apathy is an evident sign that the European Union is not engaging with citizens. The third, and perhaps toughest challenge, is to accept that Euroscepticism is a reality which must somehow be integrated into the overall agenda of the EU.

Such views cannot be discarded on grounds of being uncomfortable or contrary to the initial aims of the EU. Rather, they must be embraced and integrated into its overall vision. Failure to do so may increase the perception that the so-called “democratic deficit” is widening.

The EU’s institutions are all-too-often accused of being a “grave train” for “Eurocrats”. In other instances the EU is viewed as an elitist organisation whose only

aim is to impose unnecessary legislation. Prior to the financial crisis, the EU was also viewed as a reliable source of funds and subsidies – a “cash cow” to be milked by vested interests. These concerns cannot be ignored for they shape the way citizens relate to the Institutions.

The EU must not backtrack on its commitment to expand its borders. Enlargement has opened up various opportunities for numerous citizens in Eastern Europe and in the Mediterranean. Realistic institutions based on the challenges Europe faces can ensure that this process is not stalled or nullified by bureaucratic inefficiencies and institutional shortsightedness. The EU must also remain steadfast in its support for growth in the Eurozone. Such growth is dependent on private sector investment, research and innovation. These factors are essential to combat the scourge of unemployment and underemployment.

The above analysis does not seek to overplay the challenges Europe faces. If the European Union is to have a future, it must acknowledge its past, come to terms with the present and embark on a soul-searching exercise to determine its future. This future could be completely different from what was previously envisaged and such a process can be daunting. Nonetheless, this process might result in a stronger Europe based on a sounder footing and realistic goals and principles.

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