

Lyon 2006 - European Ideas Fair Speeches

European Ideas Fair

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Second Roundtable - *The European Agenda for Revival*

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I think we need to see Europe's future and its future challenges as the founding fathers saw them. Do as they did: have a vision, but also be extremely practical, pragmatic and modest. I think this method is still the best, because we cannot imagine Europe in 2020 and beyond without our citizens. That is not to say that we have to follow them, particularly when they say 'no', and in any case if they do say 'no' it is because we are following them a bit too much. But we can't do it without them, if we don't keep our democratic convictions in mind on a day-to-day basis, and we can't build Europe if it does not meet the most basic democratic criteria.

So this is something else we need to bear in mind. I think there are four challenges that we need to keep constantly reviewing when discussing questions of European policy.

First, there is the territorial challenge; second, the challenge of growth and the economy; third, the challenge of democracy; and fourth, the challenge of Europe as an international player.

The territorial challenge is to do with enlargement, and it is something we cannot avoid. Enlargement has been a huge success. We have rolled out democracy beyond our borders, but you won't stop most people in Europe from seeing it as a headlong rush. So whenever enlargement comes up in future, in the tricky areas of the Balkans, Turkey, Ukraine and others, we cannot go on as we have done in the past, pursuing enlargement as the only policy outside our own borders. We need a new policy on enlargement - and incidentally, I don't like this word: it isn't and never has been a case of enlargement, but of the expansion of Europe, and this is the word often used in the Anglo-Saxon press.

Europe has enlarged, increased in size. We cannot go on doing this as a mechanical, administrative process as

we have done in the past. For 2020 we need to define who is in and who is out. I am not saying we need to define a frontier, like in the Treaty of Westphalia, keeping out a potential enemy. I think that Europe has shown that the old concept of frontier has changed. We need an inside and an outside if we are to have a European identity, and I would urge all our friends, particularly the MEPs, to get to grips with this. It will take a lot of time to come up with new ideas, to have both neighbours with whom we have friendly economic and perhaps sometimes political relations, and an 'inside' which enables those in Europe to feel that they have a European identity.

I won't say much about the second challenge, which is growth. I would add that investment, research, innovation, attracting businesses, particularly big consortia, and the demographic question are all real challenges for Europe's growth and economy over the next 20 years.

I would like to spend five minutes talking about the demographic challenge. The idea of legitimacy was mentioned, but I think we also need to talk about transparency. We need to talk about democratic methods or methods currently accepted by democrats, which now need to be practised in the European institutions, since we are talking about political union. I know that this is difficult, but I also know that it is a target, a vision we have to set ourselves. We need to have transparency, not just transparency through having additional regulations on lobbying, we need transparency on discussions in the Council of Ministers, for example. We need to practise this and we need to demand that others practise it. We also need to coordinate the activities of the national parliaments, not just in order to monitor bureaucracy in Brussels - which is what is always mentioned - but because they still hold some sovereignty and legitimacy, and we have to find them a role, as the draft Constitution did.

We also need to be bold and come up with different models. A democratic parliament like the European Parliament is a parliament which has the right of initiative. Why don't the MEPs demand to have a legislative initiative? Any parliament which doesn't have a legislative initiative is not a democratic parliament. You couldn't imagine a national parliament in a Member State not having a legislative initiative. I am quite aware that this presents a lot of problems, but the European Parliament could exercise a joint right of initiative with the Council, for example, instead of leaving the Commission with the monopoly. Believe me, this is what the people of Europe are waiting for, because they want to know who is taking the decisions, they want to be able to identify them, that's what democracy is all about. We cannot be Europeans promoting democracy throughout the world and not observe it in our own institutions.

One final point: the international stage.

I would just like to pick up on a couple of details that are slightly awkward, though I know this is not an expression people use these days. The question of European defence is in the open now. Our troops are in Lebanon. Most of the troops there are European, yet even this summer (2006) some Member States did not want Javier Solana to be the only negotiator.

As regards the economy, international power depends on something that you have the means and the power to get to grips with straight away: the defence economy. This links up once again with the ideas of innovation, research and technology. As far as defence technology is concerned, if we want to develop an independent European defence industry while still remaining on friendly terms with the USA, we are going to have to take a number of decisions. Believe me, I may be speaking a little prematurely here, but if I was saying the same thing

in 2020 it would be too late. In the defence industry, issues will arise that are currently totally absent from the European debate, such as Community preference in the technology field, for instance, which is currently banned, but which we are going to have to address.

Lastly, Europe's international position. Europe has a certain concept of multilateralism and is also a major regulator of international trade and has a certain view of human rights. Over the next 20 years we need to clarify our positions on transatlantic relations, which no-one wants to undermine, but for which new rules perhaps need to be defined. I am thinking here of what has happened in recent years in Iraq and Lebanon, for example. We also need to do the same with Russia. After enlargement we simply have to have joint discussions to decide what to do about a country that Europe has no choice but to have as a partner, as we can see clearly from the energy issue.

I think that if we want to meet our future challenges - the Asian challenge, the economic challenge - we need to set ourselves targets, not stand in the way of exchanges of ideas and try together to follow the example of the founding fathers, who were both wildly bold and extremely modest.