

The Future of Europe

By Mr Walter SCHWIMMER, rapporteur

The European Association is concerned about the state of Europe that is at a crossroads. The Europeans have to decide whether they want a strong Europe playing an important role in a fast changing world or to fall back to the outdated nationalism of the 19th century and being marginalized on our globe.

Indeed, there is a “polycrisis” with still unsolved conflicts, violence and even wars in the East of the continent. The economy of Europe is still fragile, suffering from of 2008, budgetary problems in EU-member countries, the return of protectionism and an adverse position of the US administration towards EU and free trade and last but not least the UK leaving the European Union. The ecological crisis and climate change are going on. The policies pursued by EU member states on the migration and refugee issue demonstrate a lack of solidarity within Europe and the inability of finding and implementing common solutions which must be overcome.

Some nationalistic governments show lack of respect for democracy and the common European values, in particular for the independence of the judiciary, the freedom of press and association and women’s rights.

The weakness of national and European politics to cope with these challenges has led to increased dissatisfaction among a growing part of the population and to the rise of populist parties and nationalist movements. In this situation the former parliamentarians want to contribute to a better future of Europe where a dignified life for all is possible.

Their answer is not less but more Europe, not less but more Union in all matters where joint actions make us stronger but at the same time more respect for subsidiarity. The principle of “Unity in Diversity” where the European countries keep their identity and tradition and cooperate for their common benefit must be respected. The leadership of the Union should be strengthened, in particular through the election of the President of the Commission by the European Parliament on the result of the European election.

We also need more Pan-European perspectives. The EU is a significant part of Europe and an important instrument of European integration but is not the whole of Europe. Therefore, the Union and the Council of Europe should enter into more cooperation to include all European nations in the unique project of European peace. That includes the consideration of a security architecture for Europe including all European states and an efficient control of the external borders of Europe.

The “Brexit” must not create new borders, in particular between British Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and the door for a return should be kept open.

In the circumstances of the world today Europe needs also more self-assertion, towards new challenges such as the emergence of powers like China or a new kind of isolationism in the US.

The European Association of former Members of Parliaments of the Member States of the Council of Europe thinks it is indispensable to revitalize the common heritage of the European peoples built on humanist, cultural and democratic ideals, cemented by history, in order to re-inforce the efforts for a better life in Europe and for the place of Europe in the new concert of global and emerging powers, facing new demographic, ecological, economical and security challenges, founding its legitimacy on the promotion of democracy and human rights, harmonious economic development as well as on better and more development assistance for disadvantaged countries.

Mutual understanding, cooperation and solidarity for the common good and the wellbeing of all Europeans will prevail over still existing disagreements, tensions and conflicts.

The future of Europe is never again war, never again dictatorship, living together in peace and democracy!