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THE EU AND THE WORLD: NEW CHALLENGES AND TRENDS

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Reconstructing common Europe - Focus on the core

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European integration project has begun as an initiative that was trying to find new solutions to the most insistent problems of its time. Europe as a term was created in order to save itself through cooperation that would be mutually beneficial and respected. These goals and values have survived the first serious crisis in the sixties, but their absence in the twenty first century is a core reason why we are now facing the second one. The main issues of EU are interconnected. Its lack of public support has its roots in fractionalism that can be seen in the general description of what the EU does. To start answering the essay question – we do have the imminent challenges of European integration. But they are far from being new.

To sum the problems up in one sentence – EU is not competitive, stable or economically strong enough to earn the respect and at least critical acceptance of the citizens of its member states. These are two sides of the same Euro coin. At once, there is either no public support for European cooperation, or it is rapidly decreasing. And for the second, EU keeps coming with the new ideas of cooperation and further integration in various fields of public policies without having the solid ground in the most basic areas of mutual support. Its never ending effort to enhance yet another aspect of our lives is viewed as misplaced, when even the foundations of the EU are at stake since the beginning of this century. Therefore the main and foremost the only focus of the EU today should be its reconstruction and revitalisation as the main player and guarantee of the economic stability and growth in Europe. The expression “foremost only” in the last sentence has two meanings. EU should give *all* its forces to the completion of economic and monetary union, and it should take *fewer actions* in other areas to resurrect the image of European cooperation as something that is useful, focused, beneficial and non-constraining.

To re-launch Europe as an economic project does not mean going backwards. On the contrary the Euro currency is having its struggles mostly because it stands alone as the monetary union without the much needed support of its economic measures. Steps undertaken in the past months in the light of current crisis in this field might be the way to go. We cannot really sustain having common currency without having at least coordinated economic systems. Fiscal coordination and binding non-dept policies can, in the long term, provide EU with the guaranties, that EU as a whole is diverse yet stable area worth investing into. Common currency is just a roof of this idea, currently missing its stones and walls.

Second important issue regarding the competitiveness and sustainability of European economic stability is EU’s investments to the future. In current global situations when new powers like China

or India are rising, EU states have to fully realise that by themselves they don't stand a chance in competing them. We can't possibly beat those emerging economies in quantity but we have a great potential in our innovations, technologies and services. Therefore EU should focus strongly on providing a space for development of these innovations and technologies, mainly by offering investments but also by providing support and platforms for integration of business, research and education. We can see some progress in this area for example within European institute of Innovation and Technology.<sup>1</sup> EU decided to invest over three billion euro in this project consisting of Knowledge and Innovation Communities however it strongly relies on willingness of business partners to invest into these projects. So once again we come across the fact that companies need to be sure of stable economical environment to be willing and capable of big investments that EU expects them to make. If EU manages to provide that together with motivating businesses to participate in innovation and research projects we can keep up with the rest of the world.

Essential part of innovations and research is education. Europe needs to support education of young people and help them to develop their potential. EU should encourage not only higher numbers of people with education (as it does in Strategy Europe 2020 goals) but also focus on rising quality of education. Quantity is not always the right solution. Very important aspect is also connection of education and practice; Universities should reflect job market demand and provide the kind of experts that are needed. Better connection of research and business should ensure this reflection.

As we mentioned earlier according to us there is currently no need for new policy areas to be developed. First we need to renew the belief of people in the EU project. We can see big scepticism among EU citizens towards EU, often all they see are the restrictions, demands and money being pumped into system with no real results. What we need is to restore economical prosperity which is the most visible aspect for citizens. They have to believe once again that EU is a meaningful project and that our diversity and multilateral character of economy and trade is our strong point in today's world. EU should therefore focus on restoring the prosperity again and showing its citizens that EU still is a great project with future and not only bunch of states arguing about money.

As a framework for its future development EU has adopted the Europe 2020 strategy. As we are limited by scale of this paper we won't go into analyzing separate benchmarks and goals. However most of them are in accordance of what we mentioned earlier. EU aims to develop education, innovations and digital society, build a more competitive low-carbon economy and focus on the environment, raise the employment rate, repair financial sector and safeguard euro zone. All of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://eit.europa.eu/>

these are great goals, problem is their fulfilling. We already had a very ambitious strategy few years ago (Lisbon strategy) but even though the goals included looked very good on the paper their implementation fell behind promises. EU should therefore focus on preventing this scenario happening once again with Europe 2020. EU has set clear benchmarks and also allowed to countries to adjust them according to their national specifics, the goal now is to manage to control their fulfilment and encourage countries to follow agreed goals. It won't be n easy task but if EU manages as a whole to fulfil at least a bigger part of those benchmarks its future should be brighter than today's reality.

To achieve all those changes and development we mentioned above, one more thing is essential and it's openness to constructive criticism. EU shouldn't forget its motto: "United in diversity". Identification with EU values and socialization tend to be very strong within EU institutions and often it's very difficult for the voice of criticism to be heard and a view from outside to be taken into consideration. Different opinions shouldn't be automatically identified as euro skepticism and refused just out of principle. For sure EU needs to stabilize internally and deal with problems, but it shouldn't lose the perspective and the bigger picture and accept that there may be a different way to address problems. There should always be a room for an alternative solutions and less "peer pressure" from majority to minority to accept what they think is right. We need to be strong externally but enable debate and diversity internally as well

The main challenge of today's Europe is clear. To survive as a beneficial and respected organization that is foremost capable of solving the problems of our continent. In order to do so, it must stay focused on the most important aspects of our cooperation – sustainable economic stability. That can be ensured by more coordinated economic setting of our national economies, including the common currency, investments into the innovation, higher education and its connections with businesses.