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EUROPA XXI CENTURY

Declaration of the President Alain Terrenoire

Almost a century ago, on 21 July 1922, Richard de Coudenhove-Kalergi called on Europeans scarred by centuries of conflict to unite in peace, freedom and diversity of culture, history and geography.

After its tragic collapse, caused by the two most monstrous wars in the history of mankind, resulting in the grip of Soviet totalitarianism on its entire central and eastern space, Europe managed to be reborn, to start uniting. If the disasters of the past and new threats to its democratic freedoms have forced it to this rebirth, the complementarity of economic interests has also convinced it to do so.

Originally Greco-Roman, Europe was founded on Judeo-Christian values, later impregnated with the philosophy of the Enlightenment, the idea of the nation, the rule of law and the social market economy.

These references are the foundations of its civilisation.

With twenty-seven member states, the European Union has not yet completed the gathering of all the countries of the European continent that are destined to join it. These include not only Norway and Switzerland, which have voluntarily remained outside, but also the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that are destined to join and enable it to establish its external borders.

In particular, it is necessary to speed up the accession process, which has slowed down, leaving the countries of South-Eastern Europe in an unjustified state of uncertainty.

For its part, the United Kingdom has chosen to leave the European Union. Nevertheless, by sharing the same civilisation in a neighbourhood that obliges it, continental Europe will ensure that this disunity can be ephemeral and will safeguard close ties.

With 450 million inhabitants, the European Union has become a large regulated market open to the world. And seventy-one years after the Schuman Declaration, a united Europe has made considerable

progress. Although unfinished, the successes achieved have helped to consolidate peace, democracy, the rule of law and the development of trade, both within Europe and in the world. And all Europeans have benefited from the solidarity it has fostered. The European Union also has a vocation, in accordance with its treaties, to act as a major player in international relations.

Unfortunately, the health crisis that Europe has been undergoing for more than a year has highlighted its many weaknesses and its divisions in the face of the pandemic.

The goal of Coudenhove-Kalergi has not yet been achieved, and new dark clouds of storms and tempests are approaching Europe, already covering many of the stormy skies in its neighbourhood.

To preserve its civilisation, Europe must face new challenges, including the following:

- As part of a global climate history cycle, global warming has been accelerated by human activity and the consumption of carbon-based energy. Europe, having courageously become aware of the dramatic consequences of this development, has decided to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 50 % by the end of the current decade. This is an example for all countries to follow in order to avoid climate dumping to Europe's detriment.
- The demographic growth of Africa, with which Europe has maintained many links, is likely to lead to an acceleration and increase in migration to which it will have to provide a response that goes beyond the strengthening of Schengen. By dissuading Africans from migrating, the European Union will have to intensify its development aid in order to encourage them to live and work at home.
- The ongoing conflicts in the EU's near and Middle East neighbourhood make this area unstable and dangerous, especially as powers far away from it continue to intervene militarily. Europe is directly concerned and must become involved and contribute to a sustainable peaceful coexistence.
- Persistent Islamic terrorism has spread to most European countries. These countries and the European Union have no choice but to eradicate this absolute evil, which has attacked the foundations of our civilisation.
- Turkey, still a candidate to join the European Union, has deliberately distanced itself from it through provocative nationalism and neo-Ottoman interference.

The autocrat Putin, nostalgic for Soviet imperialism and its hold on his Central and Eastern European neighbours, persists in threatening them and reassures himself by allying himself with Beijing. Once again, Russia, using force to impose its ambitions, will only do so if the European Union clearly and firmly dissuades it, in particular by avoiding being bound by long-term gas contracts.

- China, relying on a totalitarian communist party and a conquering capitalism, has established itself as the world's second largest economy and would like to supplant American power. Advancing around the world, and in particular in Europe, like an octopus seizing strategic assets, Xi Jinping's China is no longer a developing country, but a formidable and invasive power.

- The United States, for its part, is engaged in a fierce competition with the former Middle Kingdom to maintain its global supremacy. And regardless of their political affiliations, US presidents have and will prioritise their country's interests.

- After half a century of globalisation and increasing international trade, the other main powers are also defending their national interests, to the detriment of balanced and fair competition.

Faced with these growing challenges, either Europe maintains its conciliatory and tolerant practice in its international relations and “soft trade” with its partners, and it will jeopardise its future and that of its civilisation. Or it accepts the confrontation of interests and will assert itself as a power, united, independent and sovereign in the areas of competence that the Member States will grant it.

If it wants to preserve its civilisation, its founding spiritual and philosophical principles, as well as its age-old cultural genius, Europe must now take into account the realities of the new international context.

This must be reflected in a more lucid and pragmatic approach to governance.

Although the European Union treaties have opened the way for a common foreign and defence policy, it has done too little. The recent humiliations suffered in Moscow and Ankara by the highest authorities of the European Union, and Beijing’s contempt for their criticisms based on respect for human rights, have demonstrated the limits, and above all the ineffectiveness, of this policy.

It is true that the new American President has been keen to reassure his NATO partners of his country’s commitment to guaranteeing the territorial integrity of its Atlantic partners, but should the European Union deprive itself of its strategic autonomy? Is it still appropriate to continue sharing this political and military alliance with Erdogan’s Turkey?

Is it not a major risk to make the defence of Europe dependent on the goodwill of the head of state of a country where almost half of the voters recently voted for Trump, who considered NATO to be “obsolete”?

This dependence leads to a preference for American armaments over European industry and the jobs that go with it. This is why Europeans must increase their military budgets.

Already subject to the main digital companies on the other side of the Atlantic, which have access to most of their data and can thus direct and control it, Europeans must not procrastinate. Just like the Americans and the Chinese, the European genius is able to invest in the digital industry, cyber, artificial intelligence, space, defence technologies, biotechnologies, etc. Europe must ensure its economic independence and promote social harmonisation between all Member States. By reducing the still excessive disparities in social protection and salaries, the European Union will strengthen the sense of common belonging among all its citizens.

These complementary initiatives will also provide European youth with new mobilising objectives.

Since the EU has chosen to lead by example in tackling climate change, it should demand that its trading partners do the same.

Otherwise, the European example would have the paradoxical consequence of favouring imports to the detriment of its own industrial and agricultural production, and therefore of employment. The political will of Europeans to resist external pressures and to be independent will enable them to obtain strategic autonomy, digital autonomy and digital infrastructures.

With its 450 million citizen-consumers, the European Union has a potential strength that it must mobilise and that no other power can neglect.

The European Union is not a national state, nor even a federal state, as are the United States and Germany. It is a union of European states. Whatever their size and population, all member states have the same duties and the same rights. They all have the same vital interest in remaining united in the same collective project.

But to achieve this, the European institutions are not adapted to today's increasingly confrontational global competition. They do not have sufficient authority, either in the eyes of the European peoples or in the eyes of the outside world, to assert their essential interests.

After enlargement, it was noted that the countries that had been subjected to Soviet domination were keen to retain their national specificities and the essence of their recovered independence. This has led to populist and even nationalist tensions. The countries of Western Europe are not immune to these tensions. National sentiment, which is perfectly legitimate, must be taken into account more fully, without abandoning the requirements, and sometimes even the constraints, of the union.

Rightly or wrongly, the European Council, the Councils of Ministers and the European Commission often appear to European citizens as elusive, bureaucratic and remote from their daily concerns. The European Parliament itself, although elected by universal suffrage, does not escape this same criticism.

The whole of European governance must therefore be reviewed in order to make it more legitimate, more democratic, more efficient and more rapidly implemented.

These institutional changes must give the European Union a face and a voice, both to represent it externally and to give it more authority and better internal visibility. This personalisation of the executive function, which exists separately in the European Council and the Commission, should be merged into a single head, by qualified majority. This would also be an opportunity to apply this method to votes on all decisions to be taken.

In order to speed up the transposition of European legislation into national legislation, it would be desirable to have the votes of the European Parliament followed by those of delegates from national parliaments.

If these institutional changes are adopted, they should be submitted by referendum to the citizens of the European Union, after a democratic debate among the 27 member states.

Preserving its civilisation and its principles of solidarity, the European Union, as a vigilant and peaceful power, will then be able to act in sovereignty, protecting its citizens and its independence.