

# Re-Imagine Europa: A Citizens Blueprint

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## **Prelude**

We live in an uncertain and dangerous world. Half a century ago, to respond to the challenges of our time and to overcome the wounds of our past we, Europeans, dared to imagine one of the most audacious institutional constructions in history: what would later become the European Union.

Despite the complexity of the project, the European dream materialized into a reality that contributed decisively to ensuring prosperity, peace and democracy in a continent devastated by two wars. At the dawn of the twenty-first century the European Union had become the largest economy in the world, with around one quarter of GDP, the largest consumer market, the largest repository of non-military science and technology knowledge and was the richest region on the planet in terms of income, assets and social benefits.

Yet, suddenly, two shock waves put enormous strain on the entire project: the financial crisis of 2008, and the flow of refugees escaping from the horrors of war, with its corollary of rampant xenophobia and resurgent ultra-nationalism. The unthinkable, the threat of disintegration of the European Union, became a reality, with Brexit transforming what was seen as populist rhetoric into a stark wake up call.

The paradox of our time is that to respond to the financial and humanitarian crises that have destabilized our continent we need a stronger Europe. However, the rise of nationalistic ideas across Europe - that use scapegoating as a means to power - is fracturing our continent making it impossible to adopt the policies that are necessary to ensure that Europe remains a global economic power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century able to safeguard a prosperous future of peace, freedom and social justice for all its citizens.

In this critical juncture of history, we believe that Europe is more necessary than ever. But not in its current form, instead, as the beacon of a shared project of reconstructing civilization by asserting the original European values of democracy, equality, dignity and solidarity, deeply felt by the majority of Europeans.

If we want to safeguard those values and institutions most cherished by European citizens, we must go beyond our national, party and sectorial interests and put citizens at the centre of the new European project.

To overcome the current multidimensional crisis, we contend that the only positive path forward is to reimagine Europe.

Here is why, how and for what we need to reimagine Europa.

*“As Europeans we are at a turning point- we must re-seize the pragmatism that was so central to the founding spirit of the Union, or be swept away by the tide of history. From individuals to nations to the European institutions, we must work together to tackle our joint challenges.”*

- President Giscard d'Estaing<sup>i</sup>

## **Historical context**

The economic and institutional integration of Europe is one of the most daring and meaningful political projects in human history.

What started as the establishment of a common market to support economic growth in a continent devastated by war was precisely conceived by the visionary political leaders that imagined a unified Europe as a way to overcome the spectre of war that had haunted European countries for centuries, particularly in the 20th century.

Yet, the strength of the nation states, and the associated national identities, advised to proceed with a cautious strategy of using common economic interests as the platform for broader integration. Furthermore, in the post-World War II context, the continent was divided between two geopolitical blocks, a situation that required a different, parallel process of building common security in alliance with the United States. However, every major step of economic integration required the creation of common institutions and common policies to manage the diversity of the economies that were interwoven, with considerable success in terms of economic performance and of the welfare of European people.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany made the process of integration possible on a continental scale. Thus, the audacious creation of a common currency, adopted by 17 countries, and supported by the European Central Bank, implied bringing together, under a single monetary policy, countries that were vastly different in terms of productivity and competitiveness. Moreover, because economic integration included mobility of capital and labour, the Schengen agreement allowed for free movement of people between most European countries. The gradual disappearance of the national borders appeared to fulfil the vision of a common European home that have always been cherished by the founding fathers of the new Europe.

The process was not exempt from opposition and setbacks, but political choices were made to ensure the stability and impact of Europe in a global world. In a world where individual governments were losing autonomy (some sovereignty being given away voluntarily, some by global forces stronger

that single governments), in a world of giants like the USA, China and major global corporations (today epitomised by the Amazons, Googles, Facebooks, and Apples), there was an awareness that Europe could only have a voice on the global stage and protect its citizens by joining forces. Yet with enlargement, the *straight line*<sup>ii</sup> development of the European project envisaged by the founding fathers was abandoned. The structural defaults of the Union started to become apparent as no real changes were to be achieved following the Maastricht Treaty of 1993.

The Convention on the Future of Europe, set-up in 2001 to address these structural problems, came to no avail when voters' opposition to the European Constitution, that forced to shift the ratification of the Treaties to the national Parliaments, epitomized the separation between many citizens and the political class. The major flaws in the creation and implementation of the euro - in pure economic theory it is hardly imaginable to have a common currency without a common fiscal policy and a common banking system – where impossible to address in this climate. A general confusion about the future of Europe and the way forward was the result.

Nonetheless, as long as economies were growing, standards of living rising, and the safety net remained sustainable, there was consent in the population at large, and stability in the management system. The material benefits of the EU were apparent, and the hidden costs kept under control. But what was becoming very apparent even before 2008 was that European integration could not keep pushing forward to respond to global needs without rooting its expansion within a shared identity or citizen understanding.

## **The Crises**

Then, two major shocks came to test the European unification when it was still a work in progress: the financial crisis of 2008-12, and the wave of refugees from the Middle East wars in 2014-2015. Two shocks that made citizens aware of the new European and global reality they were living in and that challenged and still challenges the question of European values and identities.

With the 2008 Financial Crisis, the European economies came under attack. The structural weaknesses of the Euro, leaving national debts open to attack from foreign speculation led to an assault in the financial markets requiring the richer countries to come to the rescue of Southern European countries, whose skyrocketing public debt and fledgling banking systems demanded emergency measures, ultimately leading to the bail outs of banks and of entire countries. Moreover, German and French banks, among others, were heavily involved in the excessive lending that prompted the crisis. Therefore, the matter was not just to save Greece or Portugal, but to rescue the entire European banking system, and to sustain the common currency at any cost. Fear of bankruptcy and economic hardship

brought Europeans largely to forget their common cause and aligned themselves along their national interests: German or Finnish tax payers did not see a reason to save their Southern neighbours (widely considered to be profligate) while Greek or Spanish citizens felt under the dictatorship of Northern Europe that imposed austerity policies that made their economic crises worse. The European institutions were unprepared for such a shock.

For national governments, politicians and elites across Europe, this triggered a wave of “blame someone else” narratives to engulf the public debate. In Greece there was a growing consensus that it was all Germany’s fault. In Spain the public was livid at their own political elites and their handling of the situation. In Finland and the Netherlands, the public could not understand why they should pay for other countries fiscal irresponsibility. No facts or figures could calm the feeling of malaise. In the battle for hearts and minds of human beings, *narrative* will consistently outperform *fact* in its ability to influence thinking and motivate action.<sup>iii</sup>

Then, just as the European economies started to stabilize, a migration wave hit Europe in the summer of 2014. In the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, followed by the geopolitically induced civil war in Syria, and in Libya, millions of people were forced to leave their homes to save their lives, and started a massive exodus that disrupted migration flows and overwhelmed the capacity of European borders to organize a proper asylum policy. While Germany, Greece, and Italy, first reacted by accepting refugees in accordance with the European values of solidarity, soon segments of the public opinion turned against the open arms policy, both for material reasons of rejecting competition in jobs and services, and for reasons of prejudice, as xenophobia re-emerged with a vengeance in the European soil.

In both cases, the common factor that underlined the rejection of “the other” was the feeling of losing control of the national borders, the only safe line of defence of people’s lives as they were before the turmoil of the economic, social, and political crises disrupted the routines of their existence.

Facing citizen’s growing disaffection, some European leaders went to work to adopt new measures that would stabilize the economy and assuage the fears of society. Others, however, particularly in Eastern Europe, in the UK, and in Italy, but in fact in most countries, used the increasing distrust vis-a-vis the European integration for their own political benefits. Rampant nationalism surged everywhere, and anti-European parties were elected to office in several European countries. Britain left the EU altogether.

## **The Paradox**

The situation we find ourselves in today as Europeans is paradoxical. On the one hand, we know that to overcome the structural weaknesses of our system and efficiently address the challenges posed by the

economic and humanitarian crisis of the past decade, we need more Europe. To stabilize the economy a common fiscal policy and a common banking system must be set in place in order to allow the euro to survive and thrive in the global financial markets. And to respond to the uncontrollable flow of refugees and economic immigration we need and EU-wide coordination of borders, quotas and procedures. Yet, the same crises that demand more integration, have created nationalist reactions that block any additional efforts towards effective solutions. This paradox is worsening the economic and social crises, that, in turn, induce centrifugal movements ending up in a “sauve qui peut” scenario in which European countries are increasingly split between themselves and within each nation, as anti-European forces become decisive in policy making.

### **Who to blame**

Strong emotions running high in the European public discourse makes it easy to find a “scapegoat” for all the problems we are facing. Something that many politicians have not been weary of using for their own political gain. Italy’s Lega Nord movement, who had been blaming Southern Italy for all of Italy’s problems found a new, much more effective enemy: the migrants and refugees, changing its name to just Lega and becoming one of Italy’s leading political parties. The extreme right-wing parties across most European countries became mainstream overnight for much the same reasons. In the UK, Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage could blame Europe for the UK’s decreasing global impact holding-up the dream of the British Empire 2.0 if Brexit was achieved. All easily-accessible narratives that push the emotional buttons of voters across the continent.

“Europe” and “immigration” became the scapegoats for all that was wrong with the world.

We do not hold that citizens across Europe are wrong in being frustrated with the European Union and their political elites. We strongly believe that this anger and fear is rooted in a much-needed re-evaluation of our current system and the values that have brought us where we are today. What we disagree with are the simple blame-game answers provided by many of these individuals and groups. The challenges we face today will not be fixed by being either *anti-the other* (last time a similar wave was seen in Europe was in the 1930s...), or being *anti-Euro* (it is important to remember that the previous system of European currency exchange was not working which is precisely why the Euro was devised).

We hold that the challenge ahead of us is both bigger and more important: the past decades have seen a number of major social, technological, economic and cultural transformations. A paradigm shift that will require us to change the way we organise society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Changing world

Society, as any other entity, is in constant evolution, developing in parallel with changing environmental transformations and adapting to the world around it. The 2008 financial crisis did not only cripple the global economy, it signalled the beginning of the end of the ideological system that had shaped the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the political ramifications of this crisis of identity, at the same time economic, social and political, can be felt across the world.

Today, individuals, organisations and even nations operate as actors in much more complex and interactive networks. This shift has weakened the economic autonomy of governments transforming a world based on sovereign nation-states into a world of interdependent nation states that share sovereignty. Whilst new technologies have transformed the way we interact and communicate, creating a network society<sup>iv</sup>, our governance structures are still based on the local, national and sometimes regional institutions.<sup>v</sup>

As political, economic, financial and academic elites are struggling to come up with viable solutions to cope with this shifting paradigm, we are witnessing the rise of groups and social movements who are not feeling included in this globalizing world and are resisting the power of these networks. Not just in Europe. This sense of alienation, of not belonging, has been translated into anti-establishment, anti-government anti-elite movements across the world. From the Occupy Wallstreet and Indignados movements to the creation of alternative political parties such as Podemos and the 5 Star Movement.

This dissatisfaction has been translated into an overall distrust in *the System*<sup>vi</sup>. Citizens are not trusting their governments by and large these days; they are not trusting, in fact, anyone except themselves and their identity networks, and in some cases, social movements with alternative values.<sup>vii</sup>

What we are witnessing is the outcry of citizens across the world for a need for a new value-order in our global world. A world that is fairer; A world that is more sustainable; A world that is more resilient; A world that puts the human and the humane back in our way of interacting. Cultural values are what lay at the heart of social movements in the digital age focussing on shaping the minds and hearts of people rather than seizing political power.<sup>viii</sup>

Nowhere is this frustration more felt than in Europe. New political voices are appearing across the continent and across the political spectrum against the dominating values of today's ultra-competitive global economy. As Europeans, we have overcome two of the deadliest wars in the history of mankind and created a society that is envied across the world: an open, tolerant society that protects human rights and liberties, where the social welfare system takes care of the weakest in society and creates

opportunities for all. A society that guarantees freedom of speech and expression and where every citizen is the same in front of the law. A society that finds strength in diversity. These are the values that we will have to look towards to guide us into the future.

## **European identity**

We hold that today's challenges require us to reimagine Europe. Or Europa, as President Giscard d'Estaing prefers calling the future European project to distinguish it from the European Union.<sup>ix</sup> We agree that the crises that have plagued Europe in the last decade stem to a large extent from the flaws in its construction combined with a global paradigm shift. We are aware that the world has changed dramatically. We are attentive towards the new technologies that are being developed and that will radically change the way we organise our lives. We are convinced that the only way to protect our European way of life is by uniting within a stronger Europe: Europa.

Yet, the failure of solidarity bonds among Europeans echoes the broader break up of solidarity among humans arising from our extremely individualistic culture, glorified by the ideology of competition as a way of life, and enforced in the digital networks that have induced a new sociability: networked individualism. We do not object to the necessary dynamics of open markets. Yet, to extend the competitive logic to all domains of human behaviour is the nurturing culture of the mistrust of "the other", always a potential threat.

At the roots of the difficulties arising in the process of creating Europa lies the absence of a common European identity and a clear vision as to why we need Europe. Why should we be in solidarity with people from other nations, sharing resources or accepting the policies decided by their governments?

Putting it bluntly: in a situation of structural uncertainty derived from financial volatility, technological revolution, geopolitical instability, massive human migrations, and crisis of legitimacy in the political institutions, there is little room left for institution building at a European scale. Citizens retrench in their known national, regional and sometimes local boundaries and reject to share their fate with those with whom they do not share basic identity. Thus, is this the end? There is no way out towards a new, unified Europe?

In our view there is a way forward if we develop a shared European identity that would guide and legitimize the effort. An identity not constructed on the past but projected towards the future. Yet, this "identity project" cannot be a made up of some sort of wishful thinking; it exists already, in strong values that inhabit the minds of most European citizens, and that can be recognized in the practice of their everyday lives. Values that are not part of a political program, or of any state policy but embedded in the

common consciousness of people at large, and they are specific to Europe because they are the result of a civilizational effort sustained over centuries, in spite of the confrontations we have experienced.

Common policies, such as financial or immigration policies, can only be designed and implemented across national borders if the values they serve are largely shared. This is why the reconstruction of European unification will not come from deciding specific policies, that will lack consensus, but by advancing the debate towards common goals. We must answer the question "Europe for what?" if we want Europeans to be the protagonists of their own history, beyond the current democratic deficit.

Yet, which are these shared European values? How can we detect their existence in the practice of people and institutions? We turn now to the content of our project, the European identity project.

## **Our Values**

During the 2018 visit of President Donald Trump to the UK, large protests were organised in London. What was curious during these demonstrations was not the anti-Trump rhetoric but that most citizens present were championing a cause: hundreds of thousands of people turned-up to march for women's rights, the environment, multi-culturalism, globalisation, sustainable economic practices, a more equal society, to name a few. It is on these sentiments that we need to concentrate to build our future.

So, what are the values and principles that are inherently European and that should be brought forward as founding principles of the future?

### *Democracy*

The political right to have a say in deciding how society should be governed is seen as a key right and tenet in Europe. There is a strong belief in political equality and that citizens should have the right to live under laws that they have been part in developing through their vote and values. Democracy also provides people with a maximum opportunity to take moral responsibility for their choices and decisions about government policies.

Today, democracy, based on the principle of equal representation, guaranteed by free and transparent election processes in an environment which values freedom of expression, is being challenged from within and without. On a global stage alternative models are being promoted whilst from within the changing media environment is altering the way public discourse is developed and sustained.

We hold that *democracy* needs to be a key value for the Europe of the future to uphold all other values.

### *Equality as Dignity*

Equality is one of those overarching principles that have a prominent position in liberal thought. At its most basic it implies that every individual is equal in front of the law and that that one cannot be prejudiced against because of the colour of one's skin, one's age, gender, sexual preference and other individual traits and choices. In this sense Europe's strong support towards the *rule of law* where the judiciary is independent from the government is a key pillar for the future.

But equality is also linked to the core values of human dignity and human rights. Taken in this context one can clearly see that European principles such as *universal healthcare*, and equal opportunity based and access to *education* are a fundamental part of European identity.

A third level of how European's view equality is the construct of a *fairer economic model* that gives equal opportunities based on *merit* and corrects the logic of merit when it does not ensure dignity for all. As global inequality is growing (both within and among nation states) and the access to opportunities is decreasing, this is becoming a central point of conflict within national political debates across the world, polarising societies and creating a political discourse reminiscent of the late nineteenth century.

We hold that *equality* in its broadest sense must be a key value in defining our future. As automation and AI are becoming more ubiquitous, questions around the future of jobs, taxation of resources (robots and other), and redistribution of wealth will become ever more important.

### *Solidarity*

Seen as one of the core European values, *solidarity* has had a difficult time these past years. We hold that solidarity, towards people and the planet, will be crucial in the decades to come. Solidarity towards people is both important within a nation as in an international context. Within a community, solidarity entails mutual support in issues such as *workers' rights*, creating a *safety net* for weakest in society through *welfare systems* and *unemployment benefits*. But it also means creating a strong social fabric that can support values such as *gender equality*, and ensure that vital societal and evolutionary needs, such as having children, are not penalised as they are today (reminder that the "child-penalty" is today the biggest reason for uneven pay between women).

Solidarity also means being there to support people who have been forced to leave their homes due to human causes (wars, etc.) or natural catastrophes.

Respecting the planet and taking responsibility for our habitat is also an aspect of solidarity: solidarity towards mother earth. *Environmental protection, sustainable economic practices* and *resilience* are all values that are very important to most Europeans. As can be seen in the success of the Paris Accord on Climate Change, an agreement spearheaded and promoted by Europe on the global stage, these values need someone to champion them if we are to stem environmental degradation and climate change.

### *Freedom*

Freedom is seen as a core value for many societies today although the arrival of new digital technologies has started to question where we draw the balance between liberty and security. In this sense *freedom of speech and expression* are core values that need to be protected, especially in a world where censorship and constant monitoring are threatening these values.

As the digital world is now part of our everyday reality and the past years have started to show the challenges that these new technologies pose to our understanding of freedom. In a world where anonymity and the global nature of the internet supports both positive interaction as well as the dissemination of criminal activity, government surveillance of its citizens, censorship and profiling are becoming more prevalent. Europe has championed *citizens' rights* (such as the right to be forgotten) and protection (GDPR) leading the way to define an internet that can protect citizen's rights and allow for freedom of speech and expression. Liberty in Europe is seen as an unalienable right and where the line gets drawn when one's freedom infringes on that of another. This social definition of freedom will be pivotal in defining the *global governance systems of tomorrow* and developing rules and regulations that can govern the complex interactions between individuals, groups, organisations and nations at a global level.

## **The Role of Re-Imagine Europa**

Whether we like it or not, the future is already here. Or rather, the world has changed but our institutions and the intellectual framework holding it up has not adapted to the times we live in. At Re-Imagine Europa we are very aware of the challenges that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought with it and are convinced that a stronger, more united Europe, is the only positive path forward if we, as Europeans, want to take our destiny into our own hands.

At Re-Imagine Europa we are aware of the momentous opportunity and challenge that lay ahead of us. We are convinced that if we work together, motivated by a will to create a better, fairer and more resilient world, as Europeans, we can find a way ahead – guided by our values - and advance a vision of the world we want our children and grandchildren to live in. Aware of the frustration over growing inequality, weakening sense of solidarity and the central role that preserving our rights will hold in defining this new vision, we hold that this is an opportunity that Europe cannot ignore. On the contrary, Europe must take the lead and provide a new vision for a fairer, more egalitarian, sustainable economic and social model.

Re-Imagine Europa wants to act as a catalyst to bring together and mobilise individuals, groups and organisations towards this goal. We are convinced the beyond our differences, we Europeans, have a shared set of values that can unite us in building a better future. A future that can protect the values of democracy, equality, solidarity and freedom.

What is sometimes seen as the weakness of democracy is also its strength: it is us, the citizens, who ultimately define our future. By engaging in debate, by shaping the minds of the people around us we define the course of history. And paradoxically, the same technologies and tools that have created this new global economy and digital society, also provide us with tools to empower and unite us in ways previously unimaginable.

Therefore, Re-Imagine Europa will concentrate its activities on focusing on developing a shared vision of where we want to go and the values that should guide us there. This is where we can overcome our political and national differences. So where should we start?

### *Adapting the past*

Firstly, we need to see how we can address the most pressing problems of the past: the existing set-up. Evidence shows that if we want to overcome the economic problems we need to continue the path of economic integration initially foreseen by the founding fathers: after monetary union we need to develop a common fiscal policy and a banking union.

Here Re-Imagine Europa will launch a *Taskforce* on developing a “fairer and more competitive economic system for Europe” to look at how would an ideal fiscal system for Europe look like today. Remembering that our current system was built for another economy and is not adapted to the current global economy and digital society as can be seen in a myriad of examples from the past years: the fact that global digital companies can legally avoid paying any taxes ([#ParadisePapers](#)); the fact that “legal” tax avoidance is becoming more prevalent ([#PanamaPapers](#)), the fact that income inequality is increasing drastically across the world ([#IncomeInequality](#)).

What would an ideal fiscal system look like today? How can values like solidarity, dignity and equality be at the centre of such a model?

### *Addressing the present*

Secondly, we need to see how we should react to some of the most pressing new issues that have emerged in our digital age and the impact of digital transformations on democratic institutions in Europe and beyond. In the light of the importance of the media in shaping people's minds – and thus bestowing power – the battle of the ownership and regulation of the internet will be the fundamental challenge of the next decade. Recent examples underlining the fundamental threat ahead can be seen in the significant manipulations of our democratic systems (#CambridgeAnalyticaScandal), the fact that *data* is today a global currency and privacy is being put into question (#WikiLeaks).

Here Re-Imagine Europa has launched a *Taskforce* of "Democracy in a Digital Society" to address these issues from a European perspective and develop a European model for the digital society.

### *Preparing the future*

Thirdly, we need to start thinking about how new technologies will continue to change our world and how these "revolutionary" technologies, such as AI, robotics and synthetic biology, will impact society.

Here, Re-Imagine Europa will launch a *Taskforce* on "Science in Society" to support more blue sky discussions on the potential challenges and opportunities of new technologies.

## **Conclusion**

Today we live in our fragile and fragmented continent. We are conscious of the imperative obligation of Europe to integrate further to respond to the economic and humanitarian crisis of today and to prepare for the challenges of tomorrow. In a global world of giants, Europe will have to stand together if we want to have a voice on the global stage.

As we rebuild our identity from the ashes of old paradigms, we hold that it be imperative to take this opportunity as individuals and societies to think about whom we want to be and the principles that should guide us in the decades to come.

This is about reimagining how we want societies to develop. Today we have an open space ahead of us. This is both daunting and exhilarating. Let's stop looking behind us, let's turn our gaze towards the future and start imagining how we want this future to look. Rather than predicting the future, let's be part of creating it.

We hope that individuals and organisations from all backgrounds and political affiliations can join us in this challenge.

Together, let's reimagine Europa!

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<sup>i</sup> Valery Giscard d'Estaing

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