



May 9, 2020 - 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration

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Declaration by

Organisation: European Economic and Social Committee

"World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it. The contribution which an organised and living Europe can bring to civilization is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations."

With these words, 70 years ago, the foundations were laid for the construction of the greatest political project in contemporary history. Never in any part of the world, at any time in history, have women and men experienced such a long period of peace, stability and economic prosperity; never at the same time have people been able to lead such long lives and has there been such a great assurance of freedoms and individual and collective rights as it is the case today in Europe.

Despite many internal and external challenges, our Union vigorously defends its democratic principles, rule of law and fundamental rights, even if the calls for a 'strong leader' as well as sovereignist and nationalist pressures are increasing.

A United Europe not only represented the greatest space of freedom, rights and protection for its citizens, it also contributed to global stability and represented a global political benchmark of civilizations, carrying values of freedom, peace, progress and social security beyond its borders.

For all of this, we can thank the vision and commitment of men from different backgrounds and countries who, until a few years back, had fought among themselves the fiercest of wars.

The short period of time between the end of the Second World War and the Schuman Declaration further demonstrates how exceptional the intuition of the Founding Fathers of the European project was. The tragedy that destroyed our countries gave the necessary impetus to open a revolutionary path.

"Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity." The multiple crises of the past ten years have put us to the test, but each time we came out stronger. Today, perhaps at the most critical time for European populations and states since the end of the Second World War, the words of Robert Schuman speak to our present and warn us, even more, about our future.

The pandemic pushed the European Union, only four months ago, to make formerly unthinkable choices. The suspension of the Stability Pact, the temporary approval of state aid schemes, the energetic action of the ECB to ensure the sustainability of sovereign debt, the introduction of SURE and the Recovery Fund are important choices that reflect our understanding that the economic effects of the health crisis risk undermining the foundations of the European project.

With the widening of fractures and increased instability in the world around us, it has never been so important - and so difficult - to safeguard and consolidate the progress made so far and to bring Europe one step closer in terms of solidarity and greater sharing of social and economic development policies likely to revive the European project. As part of a sustainable growth strategy that represents a different model of economic development, we must rethink our social protection systems, invest in training, technological innovation, the competitiveness of our businesses and health security as pillars of the European renaissance. The 2030 Agenda, first adopted by the United Nations in 2015, then adopted by the EU with the European Green Deal, is the strategy that can act as a lever for the ongoing transformations and must remain the EU strategy for the next decade, especially at the dawn of this new crisis which is COVID19.

We must support the competitiveness of our businesses and encourage the creation of new production hubs with a European dimension, capable of competing on the world market, creating the conditions to support the global digital challenge and protect the rights and freedoms of our citizens.

The health crisis has shown how urgent it is to strengthen all of our health systems, to invest in bio-

medicine, cutting-edge infrastructure and to strengthen scientific cooperation between our research centres and our universities. Our citizens need to regain confidence in the common project also through a Union for health.

All European citizens must enjoy a guaranteed minimum base of common rights, starting with universal protection against poverty and the right to qualified education. More than ever, we must give substance to the social contract of the 21st century, which mainly aims to reduce the inequalities that undermine social cohesion and the foundations of our democracies.

This strategy, as the Schuman Declaration already clearly stated, must be "offered to the world as a whole without distinction or exception, with the aim of contributing to raising living standards and to promoting peaceful achievements. With increased resources Europe will be able to pursue the achievement of one of its essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent". Today more than yesterday, the new strategy for a common Euro-African renaissance is the greatest geopolitical opportunity we have before us.

More than ever, a collective effort is necessary. The European Economic and Social Councils, via their representation of organized civil society, are today, even more than yesterday, a privileged place for joint development and proposals; a place of convergence of the driving forces of our societies, which can allow national and European institutions to take strong and shared decisions.

This dramatic crisis, as so often in the history of humanity, can be the occasion to provide new bases to the European project and to create the conditions to build a new model of development adapted to the great transformations of the 21st century. In a world continuously in search of new balances, where geopolitical dynamics are constantly evolving and where multilateralism is faced with one of the most difficult phases since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe will remain united or it will be the abyss which we will all fall into. The revival of the European project is the fundamental premise to guarantee our fellow citizens the maintenance of the peace, well-being, rights and freedoms that we have known until now. However, in order to do this, we must now put our stakes with foresight on a Europe united around a different development model. The future of Europe, the European Renaissance, will depend on the commitment, the imagination and the courage that we can demonstrate in the choices to be made in the coming months. Choices to be made together, based on the fruitful synthesis of our differences.

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