

***IT'S TIME FOR A STRONG REUNAISSANCE.
LET'S DO IT TOGETHER!***

Luca JAHIER

**President
of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**

**STATEMENT
on the occasion of Europe Day (9 May)**

Brussels, 8 May 2018

As we celebrate Europe today, we should remember the promise of peace and unity that our founding fathers made to future generations. But in some corners of the Union, these generations are today questioning the value of the European project.

There is no other alternative than a Union that is strong, fair and cohesive. Others around the world envy what we have achieved: the first and only working model of regional integration. No other continent has developed a similar form of cooperation, which has brought stability, security and prosperity.

Today, 500 million people live in the EU, more than the combined population of the United States and Japan. We have the biggest internal market in the world and over 30 million businesses generate the EU's GDP of \$17 trillion. In our social market economy, employees cannot be sacked overnight, mothers enjoy special protection, and firms are not allowed to form cartels to dictate prices.

The economic and financial crises have left deep marks, but we have taken countermeasures with EU-wide coordination of economic policy and an investment offensive. Last year, EU leaders gave the green light to the Pillar of Social Rights, enshrining the commitment to maintaining our treasured social model.

We are home to the world's largest foreign exchange programme for students, trainees and teachers, who can study, work and learn in the European country of their choice. Erasmus has been a success story for over nine million people.

Our European values inspire others in the world. Our cherished values of freedom, democracy, solidarity and the rule of law are not a given. They are, however, our unique strength, which needs to be protected from those who worryingly seem to be taking us back to our history of building walls.

So, today, we need to celebrate what we have achieved, but we also must not rest on our laurels. Rather, we need to confidently move on to tackling the next challenges in a world of accelerating changes.

We must have the ambition to put opportunities and goals before problems. We must have the creativity and determination to transform a vision into a positive European narrative. A profoundly human narrative. Characterised by a gentle touch, a human ecology and the forgotten word of the French Revolution: fraternity.

Our young people are the agents of change. Let's give them the tools to embark on a rEUnaissance to shape the Europe of tomorrow.