

Time for an EU Declaration of Independence

The European Union is facing unprecedented challenges at a time in which the UN-based multilateral order is under attack. The strategy of appeasement towards Donald Trump — from the NATO Summit to deregulation of digital, artificial intelligence, and environmental rules, including the Turnberry tariff humiliation — is not working. Concessions and accommodation have neither reduced Trump's unpredictability and hostility. On the contrary, they have deepened Europe's strategic vulnerability, have produced an unacceptable capitulation plan for Ukraine, and a political declaration of war on the EU in the form of US national security strategy, in which he calls for a return to a Europe of nations and announces in consequence an alliance with the continent's national-populistic political forces.

Europe must therefore draw the necessary conclusions: its security, prosperity and democracy can no longer depend on the changing will of the United States. Strategic autonomy is no longer an option but a necessity. The European Union must be able to act independently, assume full responsibility for its own defence, and pursue its interests and values on the global stage with sovereignty and credibility.

A more productive and competitive Europe is a precondition of geopolitical power and social welfare. Thus, we must ensure by 2028 full implementation of the Letta and Draghi reports on the completion of the single market, European competitiveness. Furthermore, we need a multi-annual budget that supports further investments, public and private, in key and innovative industries. Thus, we call on the Commission to table a new, beefed-up and more ambitious Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposal able to finance European public goods, including new priorities in defense and research, while preserving the social and environmental dimensions, cohesion and agriculture, in respect of parliamentary control and the role of European regions and cities, and financed with real EU own resources.

But regaining competitiveness and modernizing the budget is not sufficient to build a geopolitical Europe. Just like in 1950, we must concentrate on a critical point, which is the establishment of a European Common Defense backed up by a stronger political union. Only a more federal Europe can cope with these challenges, ensuring the respect of our fundamental values and rights, unless we are ready to accept Trump as the world political authority, in ambiguous partnership with Putin and Xi Jinping. Recognizing the security threat that the EU is facing and Trump's open hostility, confirmed by the National Security Strategy, we call on the Member states in the European Council to establish a European Common Defence, as foreseen in article 42 of the Treaty on the European Union, which can also be done through a new Permanent Structured Cooperation by the willing Member States in case of lack of unanimity. This will constitute a European Defence System able to coordinate a national armed forces in the event of an aggression to any Member State. This requires an EU a Command-and-Control Centre.

More generally, EU institutions and leaders must fully exploit the Lisbon Treaty, through a federalist interpretation of it in all domains, as it was done with the response to the Coronavirus pandemic, also following Draghi's call for a "pragmatic federalism". The EU would not have been a trade powerhouse with this policy subjected to unanimity. We need to overcome the vetocracy in foreign policy, defence, and finances. A stronger EU budget benefitting certain Member States could be made conditional on their support to the activation of the *passarelles* to move from unanimity to majority voting. In parallel, the European Council must coherently follow-up on the Parliament's proposal to reform the Treaties to abolish unanimity in the EU decision-making system – budget and fiscal, foreign, security and defence policies, and enlargement should all fall within the ordinary legislative procedure – including on future Treaty amendments.

We consider that the European Parliament can play a fundamental role in the implementation of the needed institutional reforms, also in view of the enlargement. First, by conditioning its support for the next annual budgets and MFF to the European Council's acting on the above-mentioned requests. Second, by promoting an Interparliamentary Assembly (*Assises*) to advocate for the full implementation of those objectives, along with an ad-hoc European Citizens' Assembly to engage the people and the European public sphere at large.

To this end, we support the creation of a renewed cross-partisan and inter-institutional pro-European coalition encompassing the most committed Member States in the European Council, the pro-European majority in the European and National Parliaments, the European Commission, and regional and local institutions, over and above the particular inertias of each institution, and the pro-European organised civil society. We call on them all to mobilize locally, nationally, and transnationally to support these requests for a more sovereign and democratic Union.

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Josep Borrell Fontelles, former High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and former President of the European Parliament (Spain)

Hans-Gert Pöttering, former President of the European Parliament (Germany)

Enrico Letta, former Prime Minister of Italy (Italy)

Monica Frassoni, President of the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES), former President of the European Green Party, former Member of the European Parliament (Italy and Belgium)

Jacques Attali, writer, former Special Adviser to President Mitterrand (France)

Pascal Lamy, former Director-General of the World Trade Organization, former European Commissioner for Trade (France)

Danuta Hübner, former European Commissioner for Regional Policy, former Member of the European Parliament (Poland)

Paolo Gentiloni, former European Commissioner for Economy, former Prime Minister of Italy (Italy)

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, writer, former Member of the European Parliament (France and Germany)

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Isabelle Durant, former Vice-President of the European Parliament, former Acting Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Belgium)

Petre Roman, former Prime Minister (Romania)

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Michele Fiorillo, philosopher, co-initiator of Citizens Take Over Europe (Italy)