

# FRANCE'S EUROPEAN VISION

François Hollande | *President of the French Republic*

This Tribune transposes the speech delivered by François Hollande during a [dinner](#) at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris on 6 October 2016, on the occasion of the [celebration](#) of the 20th anniversary of the creation of the Jacques Delors Institute, then under the name of “Notre Europe”. You may find the [video](#) of this speech on our YouTube channel and the [photos](#) of the event on our Flickr account

## Introduction

First of all, I would like to thank the Collège des Bernardins for welcoming us here and for allowing me to address you tonight. It is the first time that I have done so in these surroundings, which do bring a certain solemnity, depth and spirituality to what I have to say.

I would like to salute President Jean-Claude JUNCKER, whom I meet with regularly, and who does not enjoy the privilege of age, as he is as young as me, but rather the privilege of seniority. He always wishes to point out within the European institutions that he is most likely the longest-serving, though not in a single position, as he has occupied almost all the positions in his own country and is now President of the European Commission.

I would like to extend to him my friendship and my gratitude for the actions he is carrying out in this very difficult period. He has no responsibility in the UK's departure from the EU, as he did his utmost to ensure

that negotiations could be held for the greater benefit of Europe and the United Kingdom. The British people made the sovereign decision in the referendum to leave the European Union. Under no circumstances can this move be attributed to Europe's intransigence, or to punitive action from a Commission against a country that has not always been tender with it.

Dear Enrico LETTA, I am pleased to meet you again, in your current capacity as President of “Notre Europe”. I met you when you were Prime Minister of Italy, when you came to Paris for your first official trip abroad. You told me you were brought up in Strasbourg – which explains your perfect French, which is just as good as your English. At the European Council you always had the sensitivity to speak our language, at a time when French people and French speakers sometimes believe that it is better to speak English, which is set to become incongruous in the future. I will make a pun on your name, LETTA, which amusingly sounds like the French for “State”, “l'État”. I am the President, while you are the State.



## 1. The European construction requires architects

Naturally, my thoughts go to Jacques DELORS tonight, as he was unable to attend. He contributed significantly to my political commitment, played a part in making me a European activist, and not simply a political activist. We have come here this evening both to remember what he did for Europe, and what he strove to undertake with this Institute. Several of you in this room have presided over the fate of the Institute.

Notre Europe was founded when Jacques DELORS had stepped down as President of the Commission, a ten-year term of office which he devoted to strengthening the Union, through its integration and expansion, at a time that was more complicated than we may believe today. Over his years as President of the Commission, he gave the Institution an impetus and a dynamism. He was also surrounded by Heads of State and Government who wanted to support him. Not all, but most were in favour of upholding the European project at a time when Europe was not yet facing what was to become its challenge - reunification - and when Europe considered itself an area of prosperity and democracy.

Thanks to Jacques DELORS, the single market was created, the regional policy extended, the Economic and Monetary Union launched and the ambition of a social Europe driven. Jacques DELORS was without a doubt the first to grasp that an integrated economic area must go hand-in-hand with heightened political cohesion and hopes for social cohesion to unite the peoples of Europe. He championed the single currency and as early as 1989 worked with a group of key figures, several of whom are in attendance tonight, to lay down the foundations of what would become the Treaty of Maastricht.

He always had a precise vision of what this treaty embodied and what it had left out. It did embody the creation of a currency that would unite countries and peoples. Yet what was missing from this Treaty, and we suffered the consequences of this, was a governance, a coordination of economic policies and also a vision of what social harmonisation should be. Jacques DELORS perceived quite early on that as integration progressed, there were risks of a decline or even a breakdown.

This is why, between 1985 and 1992, after so many milestones were reached, he wanted the next step

to be taken more slowly in order to preserve and strengthen Europe's achievements. During his term of office, Jacques DELORS was sensitive and perceptive in thinking that there could only be a "Europe of Institutions" and that economic and social stakeholders also had to become involved. Sometimes he brought together business and labour leaders in Brussels in secret to discuss the potential avenues to promote social Europe.

Jacques DELORS also wanted to involve intellectuals, major European figures, in considerations on a deepening of Europe. He was aware that the cultural, spiritual and intellectual influence was decisive when showing Europeans that what united them was not merely a market, a currency and trade, but also values and principles that could protect against the risks of renewed conflicts while forging a European identity.

He was the first to understand that citizen organisations had a part to play in Europe. This is what justified the creation of this institute, Notre Europe. For twenty years, you have all worked so that Jacques DELORS could continue to put forward his thinking and propose ways forward.

One of his ideas changed our European Institutions, with a democratic innovation that made the appointment of the President of the Commission the result, in the best possible sense, of the vote of European citizens.

Often, Treaty provisions or Institutional input has no future. It is added and never used. It so happened, after the last European elections, that the political group with the best result, which therefore had the largest number of seats, claimed the Presidency of the Commission. This did not necessarily contribute to creating a consensus within the European Council.

The Socialists and Social Democrats who had lost the elections had to say: "No, we accept this principle and Jean-Claude JUNCKER, who was appointed by the parties, the European People's Party, must become the next President of the Commission". This is how, with the support of socialists and social democrats, Jean-Claude JUNCKER became President of the European Commission. He is also President as he enjoys a large majority at the European Parliament, and it was very important that this Union be preserved. He ensures that every person has the tools to continue to carry the European project, even in this very difficult period.

Jacques DELORS was also visionary in believing that environmental and climate issues would be decisive for Europe's future. Very early on, he thought about creating a European Energy Community, which takes on a significant meaning today. I am speaking to you tonight at a time when the climate agreement signed in Paris will enter into force at the end of this year. Europe was once again decisive in this field, as the European Parliament and national governments decided to make this common ratification effective on behalf of Europe.

I also wish to acknowledge the Institute's work as over the years, under the different presidencies from Pascal LAMY to Enrico LETTA, you have contributed to making many proposals with regard to the Schengen area and its strengthening - we should have heeded you earlier -, on collective security for Europeans, on the creation of a Eurozone budget which I believe it is time to implement, and on an Erasmus programme for apprentices. Many of your proposals were selected, often with the time required for Heads of Government to get on-board, but accepted by the European Council or by the European Parliament.

Jacques DELORS has often said that Europe needed firefighters and masons, but also architects, and he was right. It is of course up to Heads of State and Government, the leaders, to provide solutions to crises. If you think about it, Europe has always been undergoing a crisis, has always lived through crises, has always been subject to emergencies. This goes way back, even to a Europe with six Member States. It experienced crises, which are not caused by the number of members but by situations. There were also conflicts between States or governments. There have naturally been disagreements when assessing a certain number of realities.

## 2. Europe and crises

Europe has always got through crises. The role of Heads of State and Government in the European Council is to overcome them. What is new in this current period is that we are not experiencing just another crisis; we are living through a crisis that hits the very foundations of Europe with the departure of a Member State, the deep-seated divisions within the Union, differences that have become heightened, with the return of nationalism, with the rise in populism. This is not an additional crisis, it is a crisis that is hitting the very core of Europe, in terms of its foundations and its project.

From this standpoint, Erico was right. We must get back to basics and understand what the situation is in Europe at the moment. Since I have been President of the French Republic, I have attended many European Council meetings. Each time, we have been required to take urgent action. The first European Council I attended was in June 2012. Italy and Spain were in an extremely difficult situation. Banks continued to be under threat and there were major risks that States would be challenged and speculation that the European Union would collapse.

We took the time it would take, in this case at night, and needed to gain an in-depth awareness. Mario MONTI represented Italy, Angela MERKEL of course Germany, and Jean-Claude was there as Prime Minister of Luxembourg. That night, decisions of the utmost importance were made for Europe, to support the Eurozone, to prevent Greece from leaving the EU, to protect Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland and to implement mechanisms to provide the necessary financing, and the European Central Bank shouldered its responsibility. I believe that that night was most likely the most important in recent years.

Then, there have been other crises. The Greek crisis, the ongoing Greek crisis. One night, two nights, several nights to find a solution. Politically speaking, and also in terms of culture and civilisation, it was for us absolutely essential that Greece could remain in the Eurozone.

We then went through a much deeper crisis, one which tested our values, the refugee crisis. This is when the divisions were not simply between large and smaller countries, the South and the North, or countries in surplus in relation to countries in deficit. No, the rifts which appeared were more fundamental, as some countries were willing to act as hosts while others refused. Some countries were willing to step up border control while others believed that each country should fend for itself. Jean-Claude will remember this, when we had to distribute refugees as we distribute and once distributed budget envelopes or compensatory amounts, when we had to distribute human beings, that is when we understood, when I understood, that Europe was facing a loss of direction. It was no longer about talking all night. We would have to reform the common framework, the spirit that is supposed to unite us.

This is why it is no longer about institutional architecture. It is no longer simply about knowing which

financial mechanisms we must implement to prevent a difficulty or bankruptcy. We had to know how to distribute.

Then the British issue arose, which is as old as the UK's membership of the European Union. In the discussions I held with David CAMERON in order to facilitate the UK remaining in the EU, I told him that General de GAULLE fought for years to prevent Great Britain from joining the common market. There was even a referendum in France, under President POMPIDOU, so that we could welcome the UK into Europe. You, today, after so many common endeavours, so many efforts that we have made in order to understand each other more fully, you are ready to leave? You are ready to give up what was ultimately a type of concession or compromise within the European Union? I believe that David CAMERON thought he would win his referendum. We have been known to have such hope too. Yet going beyond questioning whether or not he was right to hold a referendum, it is the people's response that must be considered for what it is. What were the key factors in the UK? Mainly immigration, not the question of whether it was beneficial or not for the UK to remain in the EU.

We can see clearly that the immigration issue, the question of a shared existence, the question of accepting others - in this case the others were European, Polish, Bulgarian, maybe Hungarian - that accepting others was no longer a given. When faced with this situation, how will we successfully overcome it? In Bratislava, the 27 Heads of State and Government met to set an agenda, to set a timeframe and take a good look at our priorities.

The timeframe agreed upon was a meeting next March in Rome, as it is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The agenda takes the most important issues step by step. I will come back to this but the issues are security, growth and employment, in addition to all the elements that contribute to our shared home, in particular culture, education, university and youth. I believe this is the right approach. It has not been an easy one to adopt. It does not necessarily embody all our hopes in Europe, but it does establish the line we have decided to take.

As is often the case, we got there in the end. Some thought that it would be possible to end the summit without a declaration, and then once there was a text on the table, bad things happen. It has to be accepted as it is or changed. After several hours of discussions,

wisdom prevailed and no changes were made. It is better to have a declaration than no declaration at all. Yet this declaration, which was prepared - and I wish to express my deep gratitude - by Jean-Claude JUNCKER through the address he had given at the European Parliament just before the Bratislava summit, it is our roadmap.

Does it protect us? Can it assure us that we will recover this common spirit? Does it guarantee that we will be able to get to work on the key points for Europeans? Or will the centrifugal forces be stronger? The temptation for nationalism can sometimes be expressed in a referendum, and we saw an example of this on Sunday [with the referendum held in Hungary on 2 October], although we can feel reassured that there was a low turn-out, but when you look at those who voted, it is natural to be worried about the result.

So will we be stronger than those who for a moment have the impression that Europe is no longer the natural way forward? To be more precise, people who would like to remain in the EU, but by simply coming to the table to seek entitlements while avoiding contributions to the responsibilities that we estimate for the future? In my opinion, we have to be clear with regard to several issues. The first is the question of sovereignty. I am deeply convinced that the solutions to the trials and challenges Europe is currently experiencing will not be found in inward-looking attitudes, in closure, both of national borders and in the cessation of collective solutions.

We would be deluding ourselves if we thought that the European project could ignore the legitimacy of national sovereignty. This is most likely the pretention with which populist trends arise and take hold. Jacques DELORS himself actually warned us with this wording, the "federation of nation states", which resulted in a fair amount of questioning and cutting comments. He understood fully that this relevant idea respected States, and therefore Nations, while encouraging them to work together on a number of common projects. This is why we need to unite Europeans, while respecting cohesion between societies, without asking too much of peoples, to achieve convergence towards a common ideal without giving up the very features that make them unique.

A country such as France, which played a full part in European history and construction, is a country attached to its exception, its uniqueness - some call

that identity, I'm not sure that's the right word - but in any case, to the very idea of France, to the idea that France is part of Europe. Then comes the question of subsidiarity. What must Europe do? What must States do? We discussed this in Bratislava, considering that several priorities must be carried by Europe, more effectively than separate nations could do so. This concerns three main fields.

### **3. The Bratislava roadmap**

#### **3.1. Border controls**

First of all, border control. We have external borders and it is our job to secure them. If we fail to do so, countries would want to revert back to their national borders. Our common property is this external border and to ensure compliance, we must have specific resources allocated to this obligation. These are the coastguards and border guards, who have just been reinforced. Our security also requires us to ensure that those coming to Europe may be recorded and that refugees may be directed to where they are expected, as they seek asylum. We must also ensure, however, that migrants can be returned and resettled in their countries of origin as they cannot claim the right to enter the European Union.

If we do not have rules, we will have no respect. If there is no more cohesion between European countries, Europe will cease to exist. Therefore, Europe's first priority is protection. We must protect the borders and also protect rights, such as the right to asylum. Security has also become a common European task. France has long been proud of its defence, it can deploy forces externally, of its ability to ensure its independence through nuclear deterrence and for being the country with the most strategic autonomy in Europe, a fact that has allowed us to conduct a number of operations and to do so, even on behalf of Europe, once again in Africa recently.

Yet I am aware that the greatest service that France could do for Europe is to contribute to our collective construction of defence and security elements. Germany has made inroads in this regard and it is very important that it was able to do so. Just because the UK has decided to leave does not mean that it cannot be part of this process. Yet all European countries must now work together for the defence effort and to know what we can achieve together and what we can bring about through our own capacities in each of our countries.

Protection also includes means to combat terrorism. Terrorism has hit France, but has also hit Europe: Belgium, Germany, Denmark and the UK. We are aware that terrorism will remain a threat, a fact that must lead us to achieve together what cannot be achieved alone. To combat terrorism, we must accept to cooperate, to coordinate our intelligence services, our police forces, our border control. Who better to do that than Europe? In this way, Europe is no longer perceived as a risk, but rather as a shield against a number of threats. This is the first major priority that we must achieve, for Europeans to see Europe as an additional safeguard, providing heightened protection and security.

#### **3.2. Growth and unemployment**

The second priority is growth and employment. Of course economic policies reflect the decisions that each government must make for its own country. Yet we know that we need some impetus. It is true that some countries which are in surplus should stimulate more. It is also true that some countries which are in deficit - in terms of their current account or budget - must continue their efforts to achieve competitiveness and recovery. This is what France is doing for the moment, and we will see the results. If, however, there is no impetus from Europe, and not simply from the Central Bank's policy, if there is no shared drive to achieve growth and employment through major investments, not simply for infrastructure, but investments for energy, for the environmental transition, for the digital economy, we will fail to reach the outcome we need. If we want to have European champions operating on a global scale, we must invest more and this will be our second priority.

#### **3.3. Culture, education and research**

The third priority is leveraging culture, education, university and research on a European level. Once again, we will always have our own institutions and tools, but if we strive to be the best in the world - and we are in many fields if we look at the Nobel prizes awarded today or yesterday -, if we do not have this drive to be the best in our field, in all fields, Europe will not be able to embody these values. European culture is not merely the sum total of all the cultures of our respective countries. What has ultimately made the European model is our associating it with a social, human space, one of values.

### 3.4. *European identity*

I now come to European identity. This is what sets us apart as makers of the world's fate. What often bothers me is that in the G20 and the G7, Europe is present, in terms of countries and institutions, but does it have sufficient weighting? Today, and this has been the case for several years now, we are witnessing the return of empires and power blocs. It is most probably the law of history. Empires deemed to be on the decline, extinct, are awakening and taking shape in ways that look strangely like powers prior to the First World War. There are also new emerging economic and demographic powers. Does Europe view itself as a power? Does Europe speak like a power? Europe not only has a claim to power, it is a power that only strives for peace, harmony, development and crisis resolution.

We have a specific feature on the world stage. When faced with crises such as Syria, Europe's voice is rightfully heard calling for great efforts to get humanitarian aid through. What is Europe's voice? It often provides support to suffering populations. Europe is exemplary. Yet could we do more? Yes, but not country by country, together. When there is a conflict that endures until entire populations are massacred as is the case in Aleppo, couldn't we, as Europeans, make a greater contribution if we were to decide to settle the great global issues? This would require the use of force, it's true, and diplomacy that we could pool. It also requires a drive. Do all countries have this drive?

I would like to give such countries a warning. There are European countries which believe that the USA will always be there to protect them, to the extent that they purchase their weapons solely from the USA and not from Europeans. This can happen. There are countries which believe that there will always be a protecting force that will shelter them from all types of influence. There are some which believe that there are not concerned by the conflicts in the Middle East, that Africa has no relationship with Europe with the exception of the few migrants who wash up on the Italian coast in such terrible conditions. These countries must be warned. Today we must think globally. Conflicts affect us all.

We must therefore tell these European countries, and I will not stop doing this, that if they do not defend themselves, they will no longer be defended, regardless of who wins the US presidential election. We hope it will be a female winner, without taking sides. There isn't even a choice to be made between the two. Apart from this, regardless of the (female) president who will be elected in November, the USA is no longer in the same mindset of protection and defence, while remaining our ally within NATO. This question is not raised but Europeans must be aware that when they are the leading global economic power - and they are - they must also be a political power with defence capabilities.

European identity is not simply about defending ourselves. It is about defending values and bringing a message to the world. How can this result be achieved? By using the method that Jacques DELORS proposed during his first term as President of the European Commission. A shared objective, a timeframe and a set of measures. This is the spirit that Jean-Claude JUNCKER renewed in his address to the European Parliament and France fully supports this approach.

### 3.5. *Institutions*

Lastly, there are the institutions. The European Commission which must be guardian of our Treaties, but must be much more than that, which must remain a driving force and must always be aware of compromises. Its duty is to put forward proposals and to serve the general interest of Europe. That is the Commission. The European Council. This is where States must come together to strike the right balance. It must be stimulated by the Commission and by the European Parliament which represents European citizens. I do not oppose national parliaments' right and even duty to have an interest in Europe, on the contrary. We must not fear their desire to look at what is occurring in Europe as we uphold transparency. It would be a mistake to set national parliaments against the European Parliament.

## Conclusion

To conclude my address tonight, Jacques DELORS also faced a crisis created by the United Kingdom. At the time, Mrs THATCHER -and I see that some have now revived her economic programme- wanted to stay in Europe but get her money back. Today, the United Kingdom wants to leave, but does not want to pay. This is not possible. I feel great friendship for the UK and I know what the British were able to achieve in the tragic moments in the history of France and Europe. We are also connected through our geographical closeness and by our many economic, cultural and population ties. Yet at the same time, it would not be in Europe's interest, or in the UK's interest for that matter, to remain ambiguous.

The United Kingdom decided to vote for Brexit, and I believe it is a hard Brexit. We must see the British wish to leave the European Union through to its completion. We must be firm. If we are not, we will challenge the very principles of the European Union. This means that other countries or other parties will consider leaving the European Union to obtain the alleged advantages while bearing no disadvantages and without being

subject to any rules. Being firm is the assurance that Europe will be able to uphold its principles and in particular the four freedoms and freedom of movement.

There must be a threat, there must be a risk, there must be a price to pay. Otherwise, we will be holding talks -and I know that Michel BARNIER is working on this - that cannot have a good outcome, and which will necessarily result in repercussions for the economy and for people. For all these reasons, France will defend a notion of Europe, naturally in liaison with our partners and leaving the Commission to conduct the talks. This Europe is a Europe that does not simply defend a market or financial centres, it is not merely a drive to have more investments here than there would be elsewhere. Europe is about borders and protection. Protection of a model, a culture, of values that deserve to be fiercely defended, to be promoted in a dignified manner everywhere. This is why this Europe must be defended, because, as Jacques DELORS said, it is Notre Europe (Our Europe).



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