

NOTRE EUROPE STEERING COMMITTEE

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In the face of crisis, there is a need for Europe

The current world economic crisis is the most serious for Europe since the Second World War. At this stage it is impossible to foresee the outcome and the duration of the significant changes happening before our eyes. Europe is not sheltered from the present storm: it will emerge strengthened or seriously undermined by internal conflict. As is often the case, this adversity is at once an opportunity and a threat.

In the face of the crisis, the Union has many advantages. The remarkable increase in wellbeing in all the states that have joined the union project EU project is a product of the great internal market, founded – in Jacques Delors' words – on 'competition that stimulates, cooperation that strengthens, and solidarity that unites'. The Union's balanced conception of the respective roles of the market and the state is strengthened by a social model which will mitigate the effects of economic slowdown. In the euro zone, the single currency represents a solid bulwark against financial turbulence.

Despite these advantages, if the political response to a challenge which is systemic is not itself systemic, the chances of success will be slim. The Union – and not member states acting independently or in only vague coordination – must develop a set of measures to confront the crisis. This is the right moment to re-launch the proposition – contained in the 1993 white paper on growth, competitiveness and jobs – for a 'Eurobond' to finance major infrastructure projects in the European common interest. The crisis must impel Europe to complete the Economic and Monetary Union by strengthening its economic component.

The Union's continuity and coherence of action must be guaranteed by the European Commission, the institution whose mission is the European common interest. The proper functioning of the institutional triangle – which it forms with the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament – depends on the Commission's capacity to mount initiatives and to preserve the spirit of the European project.

The election of the new Parliament in June 2009 will be an opportunity to strengthen the legitimacy of the new Commission's leadership. In this context, the time has come to act on the proposition, put forward by the Committee of Notre Europe in 1998, that during the campaign each European political family presents a candidate for the post of President of the European Commission, and that this candidate engage in debate with his or her opponents. Europeans must feel that on European issues they have clear political choices and personalities who embody them. The 2009 European elections are an opportunity that must not be missed.

Jacques DELORS, *Founding President of Notre Europe, former President of the European Commission*

Tommaso PADOA-SCHIOPPA, *President of Notre Europe, former Italian Minister of Finance*

Pascal LAMY, *Director General of the WTO, Honorary President of Notre Europe*

Jean Luc DEHAENE, *MEP, Former Prime Minister of Belgium*

Jacques SANTER, *Honorary Minister of State, former Prime Minister, Luxemburg, former President of the European Commission*

Romano PRODI, *President of the UN High Level Group on Peacekeeping in Africa, former Italian Prime Minister, former President of the European Commission*

Péter MEDGYESSY, *Former Prime Minister of Hungary*

Paavo LIPPONEN, *Former Prime Minister of Finland*

Guy VERHOFSTADT, *State Minister, former Prime Minister of Belgium*

Carlo Azeglio CIAMPI, *Senator, former President of the Italian Republic*

Felipe GONZÁLEZ, *President of the 'Fundación Progreso Global', former Prime Minister of Spain*

Etienne DAVIGNON, *State Minister, Belgium, former Vice-President of the European Commission*

Joschka FISCHER, *Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Germany*

John MONKS, *General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation*

Denis MACSHANE, *British MP*

Peter SUTHERLAND, *Former European Commissioner and former Attorney General of Ireland*

Jean FRANÇOIS-PONCET, *Senator, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, France*

Vítor MARTINS, *Councillor for European Affairs of the President of the Republic of Portugal*

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Antoinette SPAAK, *State Minister, Belgium*

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Anna DIAMANTOPOULOU, *Greek MP, former European Commissioner*

Jan KULAKOWSKI, *MEP*

Pasqual MARAGALL, *Former Président of Catalonia, former Mayor of Barcelona*

Emilio GABAGLIO, *Former General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation*

Allan LARSSON, *Former Director-General, DG Employment, European Commission*

Paul HERMELIN, *Director-General, Capgemini*

Vasso PAPANDEOU, *Greek MP, former Minister, former European Commissioner*

Nicole GNESOTTO, *Holder of the CNAM European Union Chair, Vice-President of Notre Europe*

Joachim BITTERLICH, *Ambassador (ret), Executive Vice President International affairs, Veolia Environnement, Vice-President of Notre Europe*

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Renaud DEHOUSSE, *Director of the Centre for European Studies Sciences Po Paris*

Jean NESTOR, *Former General Secretary of Notre Europe*

Gaëtane RICARD-NIHOUL, *General Secretary of Notre Europe*