

Future of Europe: where does the debate stand?

**Conference “Challenges for the future” organised by the Latvian National School of
Public Administration and the State Chancellery**

Introductory remarks by Stéphane SAUREL

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Latvian National School of Public Administration and the State Chancellery for their invitation. It is a great honour and a pleasure to be among you to talk about Europe.

If you allow me, I would also like, as a disclaimer, to emphasise that I do not intervene either on behalf of the European Investment Bank or of the French authorities. I am a lecturer, and it is much more comfortable to share views in such a capacity.

Last time I came to Riga, I was Head of Cabinet of the French Minister for European Affairs. It was in the course of the preparation of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. And during your Presidency, you achieved a lot:

- The European Fund for Strategic Investments, to foster investment and boost economic growth;
- The implementation of the Energy Union, to provide consumers with secure, sustainable and affordable energy and to encourage investment;
- The progress made in the completion of the digital agenda;
- The Eastern Partnership Summit;
- The significant efforts devoted to preparing a political response to the tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea that resulted in thousands of deaths of refugees;
- And of course, I do not forget your solidarity and friendship after the terrorist attacks in Paris and the job you have done to strengthen measures to fight against terrorism.

You demonstrated that a successful Presidency does depend on neither the size of a country nor its date of entry into the European Union.

The two factors of success are the commitment of the political authorities and the efficiency of the public administration.

Today, our meeting also shows that Europe is part of our day-to-day life as civil servants. We need to take into account the European dimension of all the issues we deal with when we are trying to design the future.

In-depth reflections on the Future of Europe have been under way for some time in a range of different formats. The debate became more focussed in the aftermath of the UK referendum of June 2016, when the other 27 leaders decided to explore the causes and consequences of the Brexit and to elaborate a common agenda for the future.

The Rome Declaration adopted on the 25th of March 2017 expressed a vision for the next ten years, organised around a safe and secure Europe, a prosperous and sustainable Europe, a social Europe, and a stronger Europe on the global scene.

The President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, provided a fundamental and comprehensive vision in his Sorbonne address on 26 September 2017. His ambition is to rebuild a sovereign, united and democratic Europe. He recognised that Europe is too weak, too slow and too inefficient but he also emphasised that Europe is the only possible answer to take up the challenges we face.

And there are many challenges: from climate change to digital transition, migration and terrorism, global issues to which our countries can only offer limited responses.

One year later, the question of the future of Europe is all the more important at a time when the European Union's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the 2021-2027 period is being discussed: the choices surrounding the MFF and the direction in which the EU decides to develop are closely linked.

So please allow me to pick up few points in relation with some key policy areas, such as security and defence, migration policy, economic and monetary union, the EU's social dimension, and the multiannual financial framework. Where does the Future of Europe debate stands?

First: security and defence.

It is the most basic and universal of rights to feel safe and secure. You know that more than anybody else.

In a world where geopolitical instability in our neighbourhood is increasing, in a world where the disengagement of the United States is gradual and unavoidable, the European Union needs to take greater responsibility for defending and protecting its citizens, our values and way of life.

The European Union cannot substitute Member States' efforts in defence.

The European Union should not compete with the NATO.

But the European Union can encourage collaboration in developing the technologies and equipment needed to address common defence and security challenges. With the Permanent Structured Cooperation, with the European Defence Fund, with the European Initiative of Intervention to be launched by the end of this month, we are making considerable progress.

The aim is to ensure our strategic autonomy.

Security is also a top priority. Over recent years, security threats have evolved. They know no borders and are becoming increasingly international. The complex nature of these challenges is such that no Member State can or should be made to meet them on its own.

Member States have already worked together to ensure an effective response to the diversified security threats, including new forms of terrorist attacks, radicalisation, new types of organised crime, cybersecurity and hybrid threats. We need to step up the work under way to fight against the financing of terrorism and terrorist propaganda online.

Second challenge: migration and border management.

The migration crisis is not really a crisis. It will remain a challenge for decades. Once again, the answer has to be found at the European level.

We do need a future-proof EU migration and asylum policy.

We need to develop more efficient search and rescue capacities to save lives at sea.

We need to take in those eligible for asylum decently and truly integrate them.

We need, at the same time, to ensure an effective and humane return policy for migrants who do not have the right to stay.

We need to provide a coordinated response to crises no single Member State can deal with alone.

And finally, it is crucial to make the best use of our external policy instruments, especially our development policy, to address the root causes of migration in non-EU countries.

The effective protection of our external borders is a prerequisite for ensuring more effective migration management and a high level of internal security while safeguarding the principle of free movement of persons.

But let us face the true, even if it is gloomy. We are very far from that point.

What happened in the Mediterranean Sea the last few days and, also what happened, or more precisely, did not happen, at the last Justice and Home Affairs Council should be seen as wake-up calls.

There is a need for strong political impulse to overcome diverging opinions among Member States.

The third challenge is the deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union.

The financial and sovereign debt crises highlighted a number of weaknesses.

The framework was therefore enhanced with eight new EU regulations and directives, two intergovernmental treaties and common prudential rules to prevent banking crises and manage them.

The banking union is a crucial objective, in order to protect citizens' savings on a pan-European basis and reduce the exposure of individual Member States. Together with the strengthening of the European Stability Mechanism, it is the main priority on the agenda.

Discussions are also focussed on how to further integrate frameworks for the financial sector, budgetary matters and economic policy, as well as adding greater democratic legitimacy and accountability to the process.

In his address at the Sorbonne last year, President Macron recalled that being part of the eurozone is being at the very heart of the integrated Europe.

He designed a long-term economic and political strategy to make the eurozone stronger, more efficient and inclusive, so to ensure that we will be able to compete with China and the United States and to create jobs. To do so, there is a need to set up a fiscal capacity with a finance minister.

France and Germany are working hard to design a common approach. There will be a Franco-German Council of Ministers next week. And the issue will be discussed at the Eurozone Summit by the end of the month.

Within the Multiannual Financial Framework, the European Commission proposed two new instruments to support economic and social convergence and maintain macroeconomic stability by supporting reforms and by helping to maintain investment levels in the event of large asymmetric shocks.

One final word: on the challenge of the negotiation of the multiannual financial framework.

The European Commission put forward its proposals on 2 May 2018: increase of 5% of the budget, huge cuts on Cohesion (-10%) and Common Agricultural Policy (-15%), significant reinforcement in some areas, such as research, innovation and digital, youth, migration and borders, security or external action.

I know very well how unhappy Latvia is with the European Commission's proposals, especially regarding Cohesion Policy. France already stated that the cuts on Common Agriculture Policy are unacceptable.

The square will be difficult to circle. Each of the Member States has national interests and at the same time, we are supposed to serve the common interest of the European Union as a whole.

These negotiations are about figures and design of the different policies but these negotiations are most of all about the future.

We have challenging times in front of us. We need to act together to build a stronger Europe.

This stronger Europe will allow greater form of differentiation. The Rome Declaration envisaged the possibility of Member States integrating at different speeds and with different intensities, while still moving in the same direction. That means that no State must be excluded from the process, but no country must be able to block those wanting to make faster progress or forge further ahead.

We need to talk to each other, to respect each voice.

But at the end of the game, we need to continue speaking with one voice, even though we speak many different languages. Otherwise, we will not seat at the table where decisions are made.

Europe is not perfect and will never be complete. It is an on-going process to serve the citizens of Europe.

But one thing is sure: nobody will do for us what we won't do for ourselves.

Being a European is a reason to be proud.

That is what I wanted to share with you today.

Thank you very much.