

GUEST COMMENTARY

Europa first!

by Jean-Dominique Giuliani, Chairman, Robert Schuman Foundation, Paris

For a long time now there have been numerous calls for the European Union to assert itself as a powerful entity on the international stage. The latter is rapidly changing and Europe does not carry the weight it should. The new strategic and political context demands that Europe make this a top priority. Its security, its economy and its political balance are at stake.

Defence: a European treaty

The argument is that the European Union, with its divisions and due to its history, competences and treaties, is incapable of meeting today's rapidly increasing security challenges. A strong diplomacy, to be credible, requires a strong military apparatus. Lasting peace can only prevail if there is a will to fight to maintain or impose it. However, only a few member states seem to share this vision and have the capacity for military action. Most states rely on the alliance with the United States provided through NATO.

With BREXIT and the American election it has become clear that an alliance, however strong and useful, is no substitute for the independent thinking that is the foundation for self-reliance. A European defence treaty is needed in order to rebuild a genuine collective security with objectives, means and a strategy. The matter is so urgent that it makes no sense to insist on waiting for the finalisation of community instruments that will only work, at best, after total political union has been attained. It is vital, as of now, to generate the necessary political will and the requisite capabilities.

Economy: open to the world

The same reasoning applies to the economy. Europe is a continent whose power by far exceeds its demographic strength and geographic size. It has no other option than to be open to the rest of the world. It must be strong enough to keep at bay the nationalistic and isolationist tendencies that are emerging all over. It can only do this by being an autonomous and efficient entity able to live up to its peoples' expectations. This is why it needs to rethink its competition and trade policies, to introduce more free trade, reciprocity and European preferenc-



es. Its single currency is a great asset; it boasts race-winning trading skills that could be used as weapons at the service of a policy.

Immigration: a common EU policy

As for the issue of migration, which is not about to go away any time soon, it raises many identity-related, economic and social questions to which member states on their own no longer have the answers.

A practical solution might be for some of them to take the lead within a trailblazing group that would draw up a common asylum policy in keeping with our values, together with an adapted economic migration (I'm sure of this, it's economic migrants v. asylum-seekers) policy - one that takes on board, in other words, the differing needs of the member states.

European integration: at a turning point

To move forward in the three vital areas of European integration, security, the economy and immigration, Europeans can now have common institutions that they can rely on in order to facilitate cooperation. Mr Juncker's "turning-point" is a reality. It is a conscious political decision. However, this does not absolve the heads of state and government of their responsibilities. It is up to them to show the way. Integration should no longer be brought about by legislating, but by example. Some could set an example for others whilst remaining open to any other states wishing to join.

They are being asked, as it were, instead of showing their usual indifference to the process of European integration and engaging in their all-too easy and not very courageous criticism of common policies, to seize the political initiative, to wield their decision-making powers and in turn to proclaim loud and clear: "Europa first!"

The Robert Schuman foundation published in March 2017 its State of the Union Report 2017. A French version is available via the foundations' website: www.robert-schuman.eu

