

The contribution of « SHAKING EUROPE », a just born movement gathering different (more than 40) NGOs and associations from civil society. All these associations have written concrete proposals to UE (www.challengeforeurope.eu). We have just printed a brochure which presents 6 key ideas to put Europe back on its feet, our strategy and the summaries of 55 proposals coming from the associations. For more informations or to receive our brochure, please contact Charlotte Maisin, 00 32 2 549 55 37

No successful European integration without democratic governance

Good governance for the European Union is not in any way a peripheral or cosmetic matter. It is a fundamental issue on which the ultimate success of a federalist Europe depends. Over the years, the Member States have ceded to the European level increasing areas of their national competencies. It is now important for these transfers of competencies to be accompanied by equivalent transfers of democracy. In other words, the elected representatives must be able to exercise effective control over the European executive and Europe's citizens must be consulted, involved and heard. To judge from the growing divide between European public opinion and the EU institutions, this is far from the case at present. Good European governance also supposes the exercise of supranational power in the best possible way, translated into real progress in the general interest by acting in close synergy with national, regional and local entities. Democratic governance and multi-level governance : these are the two key concepts.

Involving the citizen

There can be no lasting European integration without the close involvement of citizens. Involving citizens in European public affairs is to favour participatory democracy as the vital complement to representative democracy. Admittedly, progress had been made recently. The introduction of a new citizens' initiative in the Treaty of Lisbon is proof of this. But it remains timid progress. For the most part, citizens remain isolated from the European Union. At best, they are consulted sporadically. It is time to step up a gear and go beyond the stage of theoretical good intentions. We advocate a Europe that consults its citizens systematically at grassroots level. The European Union must innovate in all modern forms of participatory democracy, including panels, citizens' conventions, citizens' watchdogs and forums for public debate.

Governing at several levels

Most EU Member States currently operate in a very compartmentalised manner. Each territorial level of government (state, region, municipality, etc.) is awarded exclusive competences. The result is that each entity jealously guards the exercise of its powers. This stands opposed to seeking, for any given area of general interest, the best possible synergy with others to arrive at the best solutions for all. The situation has become roughly the same at European level. The European Union has acquired exclusive competences, such as creating a

single economic market or competition as the universal panacea for solving all problems. Giving free rein to market mechanisms ultimately becomes a kind of diktat. This is not the right path. First of all, because there is no single lever. The market is useful, but certainly not for every occasion. Building a political European Union implies major common goals. But these goals must not be imposed as dogma. They must be debated between all the pertinent levels of government. The idea is not for the local level to impose its law on Europe - or vice versa. It is rather for an exchange of experiences and visions that is mutually enriching and stimulating, serving to reconcile the necessary efficiency with territorial cultural diversities. Multi-layer government, which is what we advocate, means making the most of all for the benefit of all.

Strengthening the pluralism of ideas

The European Union must consult European civil society to enrich the discussions of ideas in Brussels. At present, civil society is represented by 1,000 NGOs that are active in the orbit of the European institutions. This is a first crucial step. But this strike force counts for little when pitted against the many lobbyists that defend private profit. Alongside this organised civil society there are also thousands of less formal groups that have no voice in European affairs. Yet it is beneficial for citizens' groups and local associations to be heard. Why ? Firstly, because they are close to the people and aware of their needs. Secondly, because they are a source of concrete and committed proposals for Europe that are in line with the day-today reality of people who live with the consequences of European policies. Finally, because these groups usually defend a point of view that is in the general interest, unlike the lobbies in the service of big business. For these reasons, the European Union should consult this civil society more by securing a place for its plural voice within its institutions. To do so, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) should be able to play an increased role and be reformed to this end: it should be more open to associative and non-governmental organisations. To this effect, we propose that the Group III (various interests) of EESC national advisors should be replaced by European representatives from the non-profit sector. Also, the EESC, whose base would thus be broadened to include the third sector, should have the right to initiate legislation indirectly rather than merely being consulted on a limited number of issues.

Increasing the European Union budget

Better European governance implies the effective possibility, through the decisionmaking process, of initiating ambitious policy. An engine cannot run on empty. In the interests of all it is vital for the European Union to be able to launch major economic, social and environmental initiatives. It must be given the means to do so. To this end, the EU Member States must agree to contribute more to the EU budget in order to strengthen it. This supposes that the richest nations will pay into the common fund according to their relative wealth, in a spirit of solidarity and without seeking to measure a strict national return on their European investment. In concrete terms, we propose that countries contribute 1.24% of their GDP to the EU budget for the years 2014-2020.

No European policy without sustainable development to show the way

Sustainable development is on the European Union's political agenda and, since recently, has been laid down in the texts as a priority. But in practice it is the economic dimension – its neo-liberal component – that is calling the shots. The social and environmental dimensions have been relegated to secondary status, subordinated to the pursuit of economic competitiveness. But these three dimensions of sustainable development must be mutually reinforcing; one cannot crush the two others. We must choose for an economy of which the social and environmental dimensions are an inherent part. Sustainable development works to this effect: it implies that all decisions take into account the social, the environmental and the economic dimensions. The time for the sector-based approach is over; it must give way to integrated policy

Considering sustainable development as a general principle

The European Council in Gothenburg (2001) was the first to adopt a Sustainable Development Strategy. Welcome progress! But, in concrete terms, after Gothenburg the European Union concentrated its fire on energy and climate issues without looking at the relationship of cause and effect between the relentless pursuit of profit at any price and the deteriorating environment. If the notion of sustainable development is to make any progress, there must be a genuine balance between the economic, the social and the environmental dimensions. A single coherent vision must prevail.

Better governance is also a question of balance

« The world is not a commodity », declare the alterglobalists. Not everything is for sale. And not everything can be bought. They are right, but some qualification is needed: we must avoid any catechism in regard to what must belong to the public sphere and to the private sphere. It all depends on the objective. To ensure people's well-being, social cohesion and fairness, certain goods and services must be managed by the public sector. But the destination of goods and services is not the sole criterion when drawing the line between the public and the private. Some goods must remain outside the private sector because they are not « divisible ». The ecosystem, for example, exists solely by virtue of the relationship between its different parts. It is not possible to « sell » one part without doing lasting damage to the whole. So, is it to be a bigger private sector or a bigger public sector ? No, we must refrain from all such sectoral thinking. What matters is good governance.

Rethinking the role of agriculture

Coherence and balance. Let us take the case of European agriculture policy that, essentially, is defined in terms of markets and prices. What if we reversed the equation, making the policy dependent on the basic needs of populations, preserving the planet and cooperation with the rest of the world ? In this reversed logic, the first role of agriculture would be to make up for any food insufficiencies and avoid poor diets. Next it would have to preserve biodiversity by favouring green growth. Finally, it would have to respect the labour of producers in the south and north and provide them with decent living conditions. As part of this same focus on sustainable development, the use of genetically modified organisms and plants would have to be strictly controlled. It is legislative uncertainty that encourages private industry to seize control of natural resources that are a collective and indivisible resource.

No economic efficiency without social responsibility

Let us be perfectly clear : economic efficiency is not the same thing as financial profit and the rewards of an activity are not financial alone. The market economy has its limits : it gives priority to the short term and benefits only a small minority of people. Once again, we must be careful to avoid all dogmatism. Economic prosperity is not built in opposition to society or outside of strong territorial roots. The existence of good social dialogue, the presence of generally efficient Interest services and positive synergies with all the actors in a given field are all essential to good business. In other words, a good businessman is also a socially responsible one

Securing public services within the European institutions

For genuine economic efficiency, there is a need to guarantee the existence and provision of public services that promote social equality while making regions more attractive. All citizens must have full access to services such as education, health, energy supplies, transport, post, etc. Yet these services that play such a fundamental role in social and economic life are poorly recognised in the European Union and suffer from a lack of legal security. They are threatened by the liberalisation steamroller when they should be protected and upgraded. Public services must be anchored securely within the European institutions, via the creation of a Directorate General dedicated to them.

Company reform

The company is the place where bonds are formed between blue-collar workers, office staff, management and shareholders. There are many differences in status, function and interests between them. But much also depends on how their relations are organised. These can be the basis for a positive working climate, but they can also give rise to situations that degenerate. To establish a working atmosphere that is respectful to all, the company must conform to certain social rules. We propose that, within a company, the salary of management must not exceed that of the employees by more than a certain percentage. We welcome the adoption, in 2004, of the European Company Statute. This statute recommends that workers be represented on a « Supervisory Board ». This Board is optional at present. We believe it should be obligatory. Where it exists, the Supervisory Board has its say regarding management decisions. This means that the latter are less inclined to give in to the demands of shareholders seeking to reduce the company to a one-dimensional profit-making machine. The European Union should also be able to legislate in social affairs by seeking upward harmonisation. Strong social legislation must be seen as an opportunity for the entrepreneur and not an obstacle. There is no social without the economic. But the opposite is equally true: there is no efficient economy without genuine social cohesion.

Integrating economic activity in the community

Companies must not be islands. They cannot act blindly and in isolation. Instead they must root their activity in the community, operating in active synergy with all the resources the local area has to offer. How often do we see multinationals shut up shop overnight, leaving behind them a social desert and ecological disaster ? Any economic enterprise has a social responsibility that it must not shirk. The company must cooperate with elected representatives, universities, business spin-offs, civil society organisations and citizens' groups so as to achieve the best sustainable compromise for the local area or region. For this,

it is essential for companies to publish the social and environmental results of their activity. A region's development must be conceived of in a fully integrated and global manner.

No European progress without a close link with the Regions

Today there are a number of vital issues that require European, if not global, solutions. The environment is the best example. Yet this large-scale governance is not possible without a close link with the regions, with the local level. Why ? Because it is within the local area that the actors can come together and work together more easily. Together they can identify more precisely the needs and solutions that take into account all the various interests: the very essence of sustainable development! The Lisbon Treaty elevates sustainable development to the status of a major EU objective. With this in mind, the European Union must accept the local level as a central actor in good governance. Local action is most certainly the key to sustainable development.

Empowering the citizens

The citizen who lives, works and travels within a region is a « generalist of the ecosystem ». He knows its needs better than anyone and is committed to preserving his living environment. His opinion is, at the very least, complementary to those of the experts. The regions are also a source of intelligence and innovation, facilitating exchanges, debates and compromises between the different parties active in the same zone. The local area is the place where elected representatives are closest to the citizens. It is at this level that citizens can exercise the most influence. It is at this level that democracy can take on a new life in very concrete terms.

Local Economic Development Agencies

So much for the principle of grassroots democracy. But what about in practice ? We suggest creating « Local Economic Development Agencies » that would act as institutional levers for a sustainable regional economy. They would have a hybrid status, borrowing some of their characteristics from the public sector and some from the private sector. They would mobilise actors from the public and private sectors and from the social economy within their local area. They would have an overall view of the resources, capital and work, energy and material flows in their region. They would be able to adopt the best methods of governance and good management for their area.

Supporting exchanges between regions

It is one thing to create more dynamic and innovative regions with increased participation by citizens, and another thing for these regions to be able to work together, exchange knowledge and expertise, establish dialogue between cultures and to act together in a spirit of mutual solidarity. This supposes networking. The European Union recently set up some very innovative programmes (URBAN in towns; LEADER in rural areas) to support local initiatives. These programmes encouraged regions to work closely with their people. Today these programmes have disappeared from the European map. The European Union should, as a matter of urgency, set up new European initiatives to aid the creation of territorial networks that engage all elements of civil society.

No credible Europe without solidarity with the rest of the world

Europe prides itself on being the defender of ethical values in the world. But there is often a big difference between principle and practice. Today the European Union should apply these moral values to itself and to its relations with third countries.

Protecting fishery resources, here and elsewhere

The fishery resources of African countries have decreased considerably due to overfishing by European countries. The European Union legitimately seeks to preserve fish in its own waters by setting ever more severe fishing quotas. The problem is that at the same time it sends its own industrial trawlers to fish off the African coast where they are depleting a number of species. This impoverishes local fishing communities, leading to famine and growing insecurity. Former fishermen on the Somali coast are now turning into modern-day pirates. In other words, the European Union allows itself to do elsewhere what it bans at home, practicing a totally selfish policy based on saying one thing and doing another. What is « European identity » worth without links of solidarity with the rest of the world and without actions to match its words ?

Avoiding the security trap

Frontex, the Blue Card, the Return Directive... the European Union is introducing a growing number of repressive policies and an ever stricter screening of immigrants from third countries. In its immigration policy Europe is increasingly placing the emphasis on purely security policies that disregard human rights. The European Union is, in a sense, being constructed as an unassailable fortress. Once again, this is a vision that is both unfair and short-sighted. Unfair, because the European Union – as we have just seen with reference to fishing – bears its share of responsibility for poverty caused by population exoduses. Short-sighted, because welcoming immigrant populations is also ultimately an opportunity and source of wealth for the European Union. One needs only to think of the major problem of the demographic deficit facing our ageing Europe to realise this.

Regulating the financial world

The irresponsible behaviour of unscrupulous bankers led to the current financial crisis that shook the economy to its foundations and caused considerable social damage across the globe. This is the generally accepted view. But it is something else to agree on the measures that would avoid a repeat of the same in the future. To date, the European Union has been notably discreet. Yet it has the means at its disposal. It should take strong and effective action, impose a tax on financial transactions, bring traders into line, exercise stricter control on banks and markets and introduce a minimum body of regulations. Daring and political courage are called for. Can a few reckless individuals be allowed to plunder what it has taken centuries to create ? Restraining them is a question of global morality.

Imposing social and environmental criteria

European markets cannot blindly accept products created in countries that do not respect minimum social and environmental standards. Progress has been made. The REACH European regulation, which limits the proliferation of chemically toxic substances, and the FLEGT device - banning imports of products of illegal logging - are both welcome. But it is timid progress. The Union must limit access to the European market for all products that fail to comply with environmental and social standards. Precise criteria must be defined, at the

very least to apply the agreements of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The European Union must also demand that the WTO adapt the sacrosanct principle of free trade to allow for the general interest, whether regarding social progress, health or the environment.

No long-term European success without a vision of the Future

The European Union is building for the future and must bequeath a habitable planet to future generations. That is the aim of sustainable development. To restate the point : the market does not have an answer to everything and is generally based on the logic of immediate gain, thereby contributing to a shortterm vision. Hence the need for vigorous action and policies that originate with the citizen. In this respect, priority must be awarded to three key sectors that are vital to sustainable development: biodiversity, research and education.

Preserving life

We are in the process of cutting off the branch on which we are perched. This is because by applying the law of profitability to living species, with disregard for the long term, man is destroying the biosphere. To destroy the biosphere is to cut off our oxygen supply and asphyxiate the world. The living world is not for sale. Biodiversity must be protected and regarded as a universal natural asset

that cannot be owned by an individual or company. The patenting of living species – in which the Plant Variety Certificate (PVC) is a key tool – must be strictly controlled and regulated so as not to result in damaging effects for producers. Genetic engineering also requires greater transparency as it can open the door to « biopiracy » that hurts farmers but profits international seed companies and the chemical industry. Without collective management of natural resources, man will exhaust the planet that will lose its immense capacity to feed its inhabitants and guarantee balanced ecosystems.

Restoring the foundations of research

Increasing the research effort in Europe, which is clearly insufficient compared to that of the United States or Japan, remains a strategic goal for the European Union. This is because research determines economic development and generates future jobs. Yet its core mission is wider, and societal. Research permits a better understanding of society, an opening up to the world and the progress of humankind. That is why research cannot be reduced to a simple conveyor belt to the market economy. The goal should not be technology for technology's sake, but technology and innovation in the service of citizens' ecological and social progress.

Reaffirming education's essential emancipating role

Today's European Union is constantly repeating a twofold message: use knowledge as an engine for global competitiveness (the Lisbon strategy); standardise education by reducing it to a merchandise (the Bologna process). In the process the critical dimension of education risks being lost. This at a time when it is vitally important to reaffirm the role of education in achieving social and cultural emancipation by training citizens who are able to live together, engage in analysis and debate and open up to the world. The democratisation of education must continue, avoiding any two-speed system in which only an elite has access to quality

schools. We call on the European Union to draw up a new strategy for 2010-2020 that takes these essential principles into account.

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Chargée de projet

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