

Wake up Europe!

60 years - a long time, much content, and a lot of success!

Today we are grateful to our predecessors. With their important economic input, they were building a Europe of freedom, democracy, rule of law and human rights.

EUROCHAMBRES contributed a lot to that.

Yes, we can be proud of the result and at this point we want to give a cordial thank you to all stakeholders that influenced Europe in the last 6 decades.

In ten years, we are celebrating our 70th anniversary.

What will Europe look like in ten years' time? You may say future predictions are always uncertain.

However, as business people we are used to doing critical analysis. Ten years of euro crisis are behind us and now we are in a period of two years of Brexit discussions.

Two weeks ago, I was in China. Then I saw the difference! People in China are hungry for success and they work in all future relevant sectors. And Europe seems to be tired.

Europe is in a difficult situation: We depend from the United States, we are afraid of Africa and Asia and our relations to Russia are worsening constantly.

China just does the opposite. They have a close cooperation with all parts of the world and follow a clear strategy with one goal:

Until 2049 - the 100 year anniversary of the Mao-Revolution - to become the strongest country around the world!

China strong! America first! And Europe?

Europeans make up only 7% of the world's population, but account for 25% of the world's economy and of more than 50 % of social and environmental expenditures.

These are our European standards of living. How can we keep that for the next 10 years? What should Europe look like in 10 years?

The other important world regions are very dynamic. Europe is saturated. The alarm bell is ringing! Wake up Europe!

Many people have lost confidence in the European project. Nationalism, egoism, populism rule Europe instead of unity and solidarity.

We know: there are fears of globalisation, technological innovations and migration including integration. But is nationalism an answer?

Nationalism has caused the most terrible events in Europe's history in the past. Now this should be the concept for the future?

No, we have to go a different way. As the business community, we want an open Europe, free trade agreements around the world and fruitful cooperation with all continents.

Yes, China, India and others will become stronger. That must not weaken Europe. We can remain competitive and successful, too.

With a clear goal and a clear strategy, we can achieve that. We can do it with the following principles:

1. Do not divide Europe! You know it all, these clichés: the rich north paying for poor southern countries, the democratic west against the autocratic east.

We should find back to unity. To swim together or to sink alone!

2. We have to reform our European Institutions.

A new treaty?

No. But a supplementary treaty with voluntary access for those countries that want to participate. For discussion, I suggest:

- Let us strengthen our democratic institutions!
- The European Parliament needs a right of initiative.
- The European Commission should act like a government, with a president who is president of Europe.
- The council as a second chamber.
- Pan European referenda in important questions instead of referenda in all member states.
- Better coordination instead of more centralism.
- Abolish unanimity decisions.
- Abolish bureaucracy. Jacques Delors spoke about “responsible citizens”. This applies also to consumer protection!
- Transparency for all financial matters, organisations and institutions, including the NGOs.

3. New economic priorities: innovation, qualification, skills and creativity will make us able to form the future.

- Trade agreements with all parts of the world.

- Open markets throughout the world.
- Banking union, capital market and currency union as strong pillars in the worldwide competition.
- Research union for example could be located in Strasbourg. This city with symbolic European character could be the European innovation hub and paving the way for the future.
- Let us double the funding of horizon 2020!
- And last but not least: Invest 1 % of the European budget into the dialogue with its citizens! Better understanding and more excitement are crucial for the project Europe!

Moreover, we need one essential thing: Mental change to transform fears into hope. We see Europe not as a fortress, but as an open society. Europe always was an idea to overcome borders and integrate cultures.

The French president Mr. Macron made a suggestion to make integration work within the local communities and subsidise them. I would like to add: why not also help companies doing the same?

Within the next 10 years, that will be a profit for all of us. We will compete in the global competition; we will keep our prosperity and have additional life perspectives for the young generation. A win-win situation.

We can have an innovation-driven growth and employment.

We can have a common foreign visibility, towards the other parts of the world.

Economy can contribute to Europe's strength! With its help, Europe will be among the three economic powers in worldwide comparison in 10 years. And remain in the economic champions league of the world!

But we have to work on that!

Who is showing us the way? Do we recognise visions? And are we able to realise them?

Who are our European leaders with vision and courage?

EUROCHAMBRES can accompany this way! With 47 members, much more than the European Union, we are a support for the business location Europe and a bridge-builder for politics.

And we have another strong power: 1.700 regional and local chambers! This is the most important power for realising economic goals and strategies. 20 million companies give the response to the challenges of our time. They employ, educate and innovate!

EUROCHAMBRES will play an active role, also during the election campaign of the European Parliament.

Today EUROCHAMBRES announces 12 entrepreneurial rights.

If politics support that, the European companies will deliver!

If politics join, they can fulfil their political goals.

If politics invest in them, they will earn a lot of success.

There will be no political integration without economic integration. And there will be no economic integration without the chambers.

2049 China tries to show that the socialistic autocratic system is the best government around the world.

Yes, we are living in a competition of governments!

2049 will also be a remarkable date for Europe: 100 years ago - 1949 - the Council of Europe was founded in Strasbourg. It was dedicated to the rule of law, human rights and cultural cooperation. It was very important for the traditional values of Europe to be put down in writing.

With European talents and creativity, with European values and philosophy, we will win the competition with autocratic systems and prove that our kind of government is the better one.

It will be the better one, if bureaucracy is not killing democracy! We urgently need efficient democracy! It's the keyword.

Efficient democracy by respecting the rights of our citizen and delivering quick decisions!

That's a matter of surviving and becoming successful in 2049.

Europe for us is a great vision. It is fascinating for us to contribute to that.

A few days ago a young woman told me: "Europe is so far away!" I answered: "No, it's very close to all of us including you. It's also your life perspective." The young woman answered: "Perhaps you're right, Europe is in our minds, but not in our hearts!" She's right!

Let's make Europe to a matter of our hearts!

This is the best response for the coming challenges!

Christoph Leitl, President of EUROCHAMBRES and WKÖ President
Brussels, 26th April 2018