

Call for Action

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We, the undersigned, call on public intellectuals, thinkers and scholars to engage critically with the current state of the European Union, to dare to make their voices heard and not to shy away from calling into question present modes and procedures. The European project goes well beyond existing institutions and current deficiencies. We need more Europe – though not necessarily more of the same – if we are to realize an ever closer union.

Recent events have made it abundantly clear that Europe cannot be built without the consent of its people. We observe growing and often diffuse euro-scepticism among parts of the European population. Yet we should not oppose the idea of a “Europe of citizens” in favour of a “Europe of institutions” or a “Europe of member states”. The Europe we need should bridge such artificial divisions and provide a framework which allows for the people to make their voices heard at home and in Brussels. After all, the ever closer union that the European treaties are calling for is an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, incorporating the states they live in and including the institutions they have established.

As a remedy to the current public discontent, installing more elements of direct democratic control of “Brussels” can be just as valid as strengthening representation. Both national and European elections should be effective vehicles for the people to express their will and make their influence felt. Elections, however, need to offer genuine choices; and people become frustrated if repeatedly told that certain measures are without alternative. There are always alternatives – we simply need to give careful consideration to their consequences.

This is the task facing public intellectuals: their role, in the words of Ralf Dahrendorf, is “to doubt all received wisdom, to wonder at all that is taken for granted, to question all authority, and to pose all those questions that otherwise no-one else dares to ask.” Criticism of the European Union has been ignored and belittled for too long. As intellectuals, we need to take such voices seriously, especially if and when we disagree with them! What is more, criticism of individual decisions was all too easily equated in the past with a fundamentally anti-European stance, while silent acquiescence with EU policies was viewed all too often as an acceptable pro-European attitude.

Time is ripe for intellectuals to harness the energy and the ideas currently emerging, and help transform them into substantive and rigorous solutions to Europe’s problems. It is our aim to initiate such a process and to inspire others to participate in substantially changing the debate on Europe, to join forces and tackle the challenges we jointly face, to rise up to the public’s legitimate expectations, and – in a nutshell – to create a better Europe for its citizens and for the world.

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