

Remarks at Jean Monnet Seminar  
“Communicating Europe: Observations from an American Believer”  
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Thank you for this invitation to speak on the topic of how Europe should communicate its purpose, especially to the younger generation. I would like to focus on how the EU institutions should communicate their contribution to improving the lives of ordinary citizens.

On April 25 last year President Obama delivered an Address to the People of Europe in Hannover.<sup>1</sup> In that speech, to which I contributed, he quoted former German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer:

“European unity was a dream of a few. It became a hope for [the] many. Today it is a necessity for all of us.”

He added that it’s also a necessity for the United States:

“because Europe’s security and prosperity is inherently indivisible from our own... A strong, united Europe is a necessity for the world because an integrated Europe remains vital to our international order. Europe helps to uphold the norms and rules that can maintain peace and promote prosperity around the world.”

He also asserted that:

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<sup>1</sup> Remarks by President Barack Obama to the People of Europe, Hannover Messe, April 25, 2016.

“your accomplishment -- more than 500 million people speaking 24 languages in 28 countries, 19 with a common currency, in one European Union -- remains one of the greatest political and economic achievements of modern times.”

It was a terrific speech, but there was only one problem: it should have been delivered by a European politician, not by the President of the United States. No European politician is giving speeches like that. Unfortunately, we no longer have a president in the United States giving speeches like that either.

In October last year Secretary of State John Kerry visited Brussels to deliver another speech on the transatlantic relationship<sup>2</sup> to which I also contributed. He noted Belgium’s motto: “*L’Union Fait la Force*” – unity makes strength. The United States has its own version: *E Pluribus Unum*, out of many, one. And he emphasized that:

“unity within Europe and partnership between the United States and Europe, remain absolutely indispensable to global security and prosperity.” He ended the speech by asking Europeans to “believe in yourselves as much as we believe in you.”

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<sup>2</sup> Remarks by Secretary of State John F. Kerry, “On the Transatlantic Relationship,” Concert Noble, Brussels, October 4, 2016.

It was a great speech, but there was a problem: it should have been given by a European politician, not by the U.S. Secretary of State.

I have been struck at the defensiveness of many speeches given by national and EU officials. These speeches are full of defensive words that emphasize protection from threats and change. I can understand that officials need to demonstrate to their citizens that they are attuned to their fears – about terrorism, uncontrolled migration and a fast-changing environment that includes technological shifts and global competition that have a particularly severe impact on the unskilled.

But Europe cannot inspire a sense of solidarity with a defensive narrative; it needs to offer a vision that can inspire. Europeans tend to mock the State of the Union speeches delivered by U.S. presidents because they seem naïve, overly optimistic and perhaps jingoistic.

Helmut Schmidt once said that “Whoever has visions should go to the doctor.” I disagree: visions are essential to inspire and justify sacrifice for the greater good. And regardless of whether one finds the U.S. State of the Union speeches to be overdone, it can hardly be denied that the personal stories used to be make broader policy points can be very powerful. Europe needs more stories that inspire. Facts are not enough. Passion is a necessity. And so is simplicity, the language of truth, as Seneca so rightly observed.

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Soon after I took up my post in March 2014 I was invited to a dinner at which Margaritis Schinas, the European Commission spokesman, identified as one of the major challenges the fact that “Member States don’t consider themselves shareholders in a common project.” That phrase stuck in my mind. How true: many Member States consider the EU, and talk about the EU, as if it were some external alien force that does things (usually negative) to the Member States. That has significant practical consequences because a Member State that does not consider itself a shareholder won’t invest in the common enterprise with the hope of eventually extracting dividends.

The simple fact undermines the ability of Europe to communicate to its citizens the importance of the European project. I am repeatedly struck at how often European politicians resort to the game of blaming Brussels for everything that is hard or wrong, while appropriating all the credit for things that go well.

On a recent visit to Spain, I was watching a television broadcast about the strike of the stevedores; a government minister explained at length that Brussels was imposing on Spain the requirement to open up port services in order to eliminate a monopoly. At no point did he seek to explain why EU competition laws exist; or that Spain had willingly signed

up to such laws as an EU member; or indeed the benefits that greater freedom in services would provide for businesses and consumers. The message was clear: Madrid's hands are tied and, alas, it has no choice but to comply with Brussels.

One of the most insidious narratives that many Member States have long propagated is that the EU has promoted an "ultra – liberal" economic agenda. According to this argument, the people of Europe have suffered the cold winds of globalization and free trade by the choice of unelected bureaucrats, rather than by economic necessity. While providing behind closed doors the mandate to the Commission to conduct its free trade agreements, they frequently engage in naked populism at home by demanding more protection.

Some other Member States seem to be at pains to undermine consensus at the EU level and to vilify the EU as an undemocratic body governed by Berlin. While undermining freedom of the press and the judiciary, they feed off of generous EU subsidies, amounting to a significant proportion of their GDP. It is time for Europe to be less shy about exerting discipline at home. Solidarity is not a one-way street, but a two-way street in which Member States have to show it in order to receive it in return.

Why should Member States who have refused to share in the burden of refugee resettlement be entitled to continue receiving generous

financial transfers from the EU? But by the same token, why should a Member State that demands solidarity from others by assuming their fair share of refugees refuse to show solidarity by pursuing energy infrastructure projects that exacerbate European energy dependence on Russian gas supply?

The suspension of voting rights under Article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty is not the only option; financial transfers under the upcoming revision to the Multi-Annual Financial Framework should reflect the degree of solidarity shown by Member States. Member States that complain about paying these transfers should ask themselves whether they have contributed to populism and a weakening of the European project by requiring the debtor countries to adjust through orthodox policies of austerity, while continuing to run persistently high budget surpluses.

The lack of European solidarity and Brussels bashing is nothing new, of course; it has been going on for decades; but the accumulated effects of it are severe. Leaders of Member State governments are only slowly beginning to recognize that the strategy can backfire.

Former UK Prime Minister David Cameron recognized this too late. For years he had repeatedly denigrated the European Union in order to appease the euroskeptics in his party. When I appeared before the House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs a few years ago, one

of the members told me: “the EU is a totalitarian super state that has enslaved the UK, and it is time for us to break free.”

A short time before the Brexit referendum, Cameron underwent a dramatic conversion, like Saint Paul on his way to Damascus: he urged the UK public during the Brexit referendum to consider the EU as a critical motor of prosperity and a provider of security in uncertain times. It was no surprise that few were convinced. The lesson is clear: if Member State leaders perpetually denigrate the European project in the eyes of European citizens, the feeling of solidarity – the essential glue that keeps the project together – is at risk of evaporating.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker was absolutely right to highlight this point in his latest State of the Union address.<sup>3</sup> In it he noted dramatically:

“Never before have I seen such little common ground between our Member States. So few areas where they agree to work together. Never before have I heard so many leaders speak only of their domestic problems, with Europe mentioned only in passing, if at all... Never before have I seen so much fragmentation, and so little commonality in our Union.”

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<sup>3</sup> State of the Union 2016, Address by Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, September 14, 2106.

At a time of unprecedented threats to the Union, it is high time that the Member States talk up the contributions of the European project. I am frequently reminded of a wonderful scene from Monty Python's The Life of Brian in which the members of the Judean People's Front are meeting secretly. Rather like many Member State leaders in the EU today, the leader asks: "What have the Romans ever done for us? They've bled us white, the bastards."

One activist tentatively suggests that the Romans did, after all, give them the aqueduct. A second adds: sanitation. A third adds: roads. Others chime in: irrigation, medicine, education, health, wine and public baths. The EU can't take credit for roads, sanitation and so on of course. But it can certainly take credit for a great number of things. The European project and European institutions have contributed significantly to the creation of a zone of democracy and stability and prosperity that is the envy of the world. The ultimate proof of this is that millions of people from all over the world risk their lives every year on hazardous land and sea journeys to reach these shores – not just for economic reasons, but because Europe is an attractive model of freedom and tolerance that offers people enormous opportunities to fulfill their dreams.

Communicating Europe, even to its own citizens, was never going to be an easy task because it requires a sense of shared identity. I often think



about the statement of Italian statesman Massimo d’Azeglio who wrote at the time of Italy’s reunification that "*L'Italia è fatta. Restano da fare gli italiani*" -- “We have made Italy; now we must make Italians.” That process is still underway one hundred and fifty years later. Many Italians still feel as strong, and sometimes even a stronger, a sense of attachment to their regions and even to their cities than they do to Italy or Europe. The same holds true in many Member States. The founding fathers of European integration could easily have said: “We have made a European Community; now we have to make Europeans.”

We have had an easier time in the United States, where we built a sense of nationhood on the foundation of a common language, a shared history and a sense of belonging to a state. As a country of immigrants, we have had to invent a sense of solidarity, not based on race or religion, but rather on the ideas and ideals embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. It has taken us time to build common institutions: the “greenback” US common currency was only introduced after a horrific Civil War and the Federal Reserve was only established in 1913.

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Europe usually seeks to communicate its purpose with ritual invocations of the 70 years of peace following World War II. For the first time in

generations, war between EU Member States is now unthinkable. It is, of course, an important point, and one that resonates personally with me. I am the grandchild of refugees from Italian Fascism who had to flee to the United States because of Mussolini's racial laws after five centuries of family residence in Italy. The EU can claim significant credit for anchoring Europe in a zone of democracy, tolerance, stability and prosperity. Just ask the Balts or the Central Europeans.

Two years ago I went to Riga to participate in the US-EU Transatlantic Legislators Dialogue. I sat with the parliamentarians of the EU, Latvia and the United States in the Saeima, Latvia's national assembly. And I recalled how in January 1991 Latvians from all walks of life manned the barricades around that building, braving freezing temperatures and potential death at the hands of the Soviet Army to prevent a Communist coup. And I took my wife and children to visit the Museum of the Occupation to show them how Latvia was traded like a piece of real estate between totalitarian regimes.

In 1983 I met members of the Solidarity Movement when I studied at the Jagiellonian University of Krakow. I was able to interview Lech Walesa, then under house arrest. Soon after taking up my post in Brussels in March 2014 I had the pleasure of meeting his son, Jaroslaw Walesa, a member of the European Parliament, and to send him that interview.

Poland has changed from a satellite state of the Soviet Union to become once again a proud member of Europe, thanks in large part to the EU.

It is not just the most recent EU members that have benefited from the EU as an anchor of democracy, stability and prosperity. Greece, Portugal and Spain can also thank the EU for facilitating their transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule based on market economy principles.

Many of Europe's youth may have forgotten this history; or perhaps it is too distant for them to care. But perhaps they should consider just how seriously youth in neighbouring countries take the European ideal. A few years ago, when I was still in my government post, the US Mission to the EU screened an award winning documentary called Winter on Fire. It tells the story of ordinary, and yet extraordinary, Ukrainians — heroes of the Maidan — who braved the cold and the risk of death to fight for a future in Europe. They were waving EU flags.

As important as this point is, I am convinced that Europe can make a stronger case to Europe's youth that may take peace for granted. The case should focus on what youth cares about: choice (including how they communicate and what content they watch or listen to), opportunities to study and travel, and pride in Europe's regional and international role.

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At this important moment, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, it is indeed essential for a period of reflection as to why Europe has a hard time communicating its role and importance to citizens. The recently released White Paper on the Future of Europe reminds us that “[a]round a third of citizens trust the EU today, when about half of Europeans did so ten years ago.” It identifies two core problems: the powers and responsibilities of EU and Member State institutions are not delineated well enough; and the EU’s positive role in daily life is not well publicized enough. I would like to focus on the second of these problems.

I recently saw an interesting ad campaign for the EU which compared the EU to a window: invisible in most circumstances but unfortunately only noticeable when it is dirty or broken. The challenge is to make the EU less invisible by reminding people how it – like a window -- lets light in and keeps the cold air out.

There are several key messages about the EU’s contribution that should resonate widely<sup>4</sup>:

- The single market has resulted in wider choice and higher quality for goods and services.

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<sup>4</sup> Many of these are succinctly set forth in “The European Story: 60 Years of Shared Progress” published by the European Political Strategy Centre.

- The EU has made possible free movement of people for work, leisure and study, including passport free travel and an extremely successful Erasmus program.
- The euro – still widely supported by Europeans – has eliminated exchange rate risk and offered price transparency and stability.
- The EU has been a leading actor on climate change and the EU’s environmental policy has guaranteed safe drinking and bathing water, reduced emissions of harmful pollutants and improved air quality, and has encouraged recovery, recycling and reuse of waste.
- The EU has improved food safety and consumer protection. It has liberalized EU telecom markets, leading to higher quality services. The cost of making and receiving a call when abroad is now 73 percent cheaper than in 2005. And roaming charges will soon be abolished altogether.
- It significant budget for R&D and innovation has resulted in significant advances across a number of key challenges, including ageing populations, food security, cleaner transport and low-cost sustainable energy.

- The EU has played a critical role in enabling cheaper flights and more choice of routes, improved air passenger rights and better transport connections.
- It has promoted healthcare (including the European Health Insurance Card) and social welfare (including by establishing minimum employment rights such as equal pay, four weeks paid holiday, 14 weeks maternity leave and protections in case of ownership change or insolvency).
- Its regional funds have resulted in significant new infrastructure investment and jobs in Europe's poorer regions.
- And in many areas the EU acts as a "force multiplier" – enhancing the ability of individual Member States to achieve important goals. There is much truth in the adage that in Europe there are two categories of EU states: those that are small and those that haven't realized it yet. The EU ensures that its leverage is greater when acting together than when its individual members act separately:
  - In global trade, where the EU has the expertise and negotiating power to achieve balanced free trade agreements, as well as the ability to defend European industry against international trade distortions;

- In development assistance and humanitarian aid, where the EU can ensure consistency and effectiveness of long-term programs;
- In energy security, where the EU has promoted the integration of electricity and gas markets, thereby reducing the ability of suppliers to exploit their dominance;

These are powerful and valuable messages that deserve a wide audience. It would, of course, be desirable if the EU were studied more widely in Europe at the high school level. But education is a national competence. If Member States refuse to publicize the EU's contribution through education and media campaigns, which is likely, the EU will continue to be associated with bad news.

It is therefore important to build a sense of attachment to the Union without relying on active Member State participation; and it will be important to find new means of communicating the messages directly to the young.

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The European Commission has rightly identified the expansion of the Erasmus program as a critical part of its campaign to promote a sense of belonging to Europe. Since its establishment in 1987 the program has

given 9 million people the chance to study, train, volunteer or gain professional experience abroad. The Erasmus+ program will more than double the opportunities for cross-border European higher education; increase the opportunities for vocational studies or apprenticeships; enable masters students the opportunity to apply for Erasmus-backed loans with more affordable conditions; and promote the ability of classrooms across Europe to work together on common projects through an online platform.

I also applaud the EU Youth Guarantee, from which more than 9 million young people have already benefitted – either in the form of a job, traineeship or apprenticeship. I think the European Solidarity Corps, announced in the State of the Union address, is a terrific idea that should promote a sense of European identity. It will enable young people to volunteer their help to respond to crisis situations, such as natural disasters or pressures from refugee flows. The goal is to have 100,000 young Europeans take part by 2020. The faster such programs can be expanded, the better.

But I would like to propose a new approach.

Last year I was in London and saw the publicity campaign carried out by Vodafone that took credit for eliminating roaming charges; the billboards didn't carry any EU flag or symbol or refer to the EU legislation that



required Vodafone to implement these measures. As a result, none of the people seeing those ads – including the critical youth demographic the EU desperately needs to inspire – will understand the good that EU institutions do.

Why not require companies to put an EU flag and a reference to the EU legislation on publicity and product packaging? After all, the EU's assistance to Member States through the Structural Funds is regularly mentioned by law in billboards and commemorative plaques near bridges, roads, ports, airports and so on. A Commission Regulation from 2000<sup>5</sup> is extremely detailed about how the EU contribution must be recognized: the percentage of the billboard reserved for the EU contribution is specified, as is the typeface and the wording.

The European Commission is working hard on eliminated unjustified geo-blocking and discrimination based on nationality or place of residence or establishment. As a consequences, consumers will have significantly enhanced access to online retail sites for the sale of physical goods and for digitally downloaded content. Many Europeans, especially the young, will benefit from greater choice and lower prices for clothes, music and videos. When the legislation is finally approved, why not include a

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<sup>5</sup> Commission Regulation (EC) No 1159/2000 on information and publicity measures to be carried out by the Member States concerning assistance from the Structural Funds. Official Journal of the European Communities L130/30 of May 31, 2000.

requirement that consumers who buy from online retail sites or download digital content receive a message highlighting how the EU enabled this to happen?

Why not oblige EU banks to publicize on their client information that it is thanks to EU legislation that depositors enjoy a 100,000 euro deposit guarantee?

Why not oblige search engines to publicize on their web sites that those using their services benefit from privacy guarantees under EU legislation. Google's search engine states that "some results may have been removed under data protection law in Europe." Perhaps the notice could be phrased in a more positive way, noting the right to be forgotten, and the limits on how customers' information can be used.

Why not encourage EU companies that benefit from trade defense mechanisms, such as safeguard measures and anti-dumping duties, to communicate to their thousands of employees that it is due to EU protection that their jobs are safe?

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In summary, there has never been a more urgent time for the EU institutions to reinforce positive messages about the EU's contributions. The EU institutions should not expect the Member States to be active

partners in this objective. Therefore, they should continue to refine the messages that the public will find most relevant to their lives, and to identify new ways of delivering those messages.

Thank you for your attention.