



# Europe's defining challenges

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Europe is currently facing challenges on many fronts: internally and externally, but also in the short and long term. The events in 2014 have reminded us that we are privileged to live in a European community of values that secures our peace and prosperity. The Russian aggression at the very borders of the EU has thrown Ukraine, a country that aspires to EU membership, into political turmoil. It is the forces that confront us now, such as Putin's Russia with its neo-imperial aspirations, and our political responses to them that will define the EU for years to come.

These challenges can take many forms. Populist movements and political extremists are also challenges that could threaten our peaceful post-Cold War order. What all these challenges have in common is that we need to address them today and in a cooperative manner. This is reflected in the call of the new President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, for a new start for Europe.

The authors of this issue of the *European View* have seized this opportunity to take a timely look at the broad range of challenges that the new Commission and European Parliament will have to deal with. The articles do not stop at assessing the current situation. Rather, each offers clear policy proposals for what the political approach should look like and how it could be implemented, on not only the national but also the European level. Hence, this issue of the *European View* also offers a glimpse of several key policies on which the Commission, in cooperation with the European Parliament and Council, will need to work in the upcoming five years.

The first section looks at some of the internal challenges that need our full attention—issues such as rising populism and political extremism. The worst financial and economic crisis since the Second World War has without a doubt left its mark on the European economy. By stabilising the economies of the EU member states, we have shown solidarity in a time of crisis. But the crisis is not

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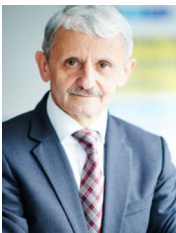


over, and more political measures are needed to create growth and jobs, particularly for our younger generation. We need to work on an inclusive approach that does not leave people behind and discourages them from joining forces with political and religious extremists. On another matter, we also have to be aware that some of the Central and Eastern European countries are still struggling to finish their transformation processes. They have come a long way, but their transformation is not yet complete. The EU needs to find ways to help them stay on track.

While these internal challenges define our values-based community, we also need to make strategic decisions on how to deal with rising powers around the world. Section two offers an analysis of our approach so far and what has to be improved in the upcoming years. The citizens of each and every country look to Europe and closely observe how it lives up to its values. We have to be aware of this and make sure that we adhere to our commitments in our cooperation with non-EU countries. Several authors identify the need for a common European foreign policy in this regard.

The trust of our citizens in the European project can only be restored if the EU manages to find answers to the challenges of the twenty-first century. We need to stop being in crisis mode, where we can only react to events as they occur, and instead prepare ourselves to be proactive. Therefore, section three gives an overview of the long-term challenges, such as demographics, our dependence on energy and raw materials, and climate change.

One of the most important cornerstones of the EU's approach has to be the values we have fought hard for. This fight has never ended, not in 1989 and certainly not today. Liberal democracy, human rights, media independence and the social market economy have to be an integral part of our policy responses. We should never stop communicating the benefits of our political system to people: not just to those outside of the EU, but also to our own public. As American freedom singer Bernice Johnson Reagon once nicely put it: 'Life's challenges are not supposed to paralyze you, they're supposed to help you discover who you are.' With this in mind, I hope the thoughtful analyses of policymakers and experts will provide you with some innovative policy ideas that will pave the way to defining who we truly are.



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