

A Europe for the World

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Despite the welter of economic problems surrounding Europe, one fact should not be forgotten: the European Union remains the world's largest economy. With a GDP of more than €15.5 trillion, it is larger than that of the United States. And, with 20% of world trade, the EU is also the world's second-largest exporter and importer, after China and the US, respectively. The EU is, quite simply, the world's leading commercial power.



But this data cannot hide the fact that the institutional model that made today's integrated Europe possible is inadequate to the problems created by the financial crisis. So we Europeans need to deepen European integration with much greater determination and speed. If we do not, there is a real risk that social discontent will undermine the EU's foundations before we can complete the process of integration that will resolve the problems now blighting the lives of millions of people.

Moreover, these problems cannot be separated from the way in which the Union – now the main focus of the world's economic concerns – presents itself to the world. Europe will need to bet on greater integration in order to escape this predicament. And, unavoidably, integration will lead to a united, coherent, and effective European foreign policy, one that is adapted to a world that is changing at dizzying speed.

Today's world is already multipolar. But multi-polarity provides no guarantee that the international system will be capable of being governed by common rules, without which global affairs will become much more dangerous and conflict-ridden.

It is precisely here that Europe has something to offer the world. It is still the leader in institutional innovation – one of this century's greatest needs – and is the best and most successful historical example of it, as its Nobel Peace Prize for 2012 acknowledged.

Other parts of the world are experiencing unprecedented economic growth, but that raises another great challenge: the need to build on the foundations of this growth a fairer political system and open, inclusive societies that respect human rights and the environment. Europe is a step ahead on all of these issues.

Fortunately, European countries are not the only ones sharing sovereignty nowadays. A good example is the work being done by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which is taking bold steps in a part of the world where integration has never been the norm and clear regional security structures are lacking. Europe must act to buttress these integrative steps.

It is precisely this region, the Asia/Pacific, that is bound to be the focus of international relations in both the medium and the long term. The US has already announced its strategic reorientation to Asia. Moreover, the region is home to numerous longstanding quarrels, territorial and border disputes, rampant nationalism, and considerable mistrust.

China does not want to see a twenty-first century dominated by a G-2 in which it finds itself alone with the US. It would prefer a G-3, at least, that includes the EU. So, in addition to the good relations that the EU maintains with both powers, the Union's experience in multilateral problem solving could be invaluable.

One theme addressed at the Munich Security Conference last February – and that should be included in any approach to Asia – is that the region's extraordinary economic growth has hidden its security problems. But this does not mean that those problems are bound to remain submerged, as the recent escalation of territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas has demonstrated.

Turning to Europe's own neighborhood, the EU's unipolar moment of the 1990's has come to an end. Russia has not moved any closer to European standards; Turkey has already developed its own foreign policy and aspires to become a regional power; and the countries on the Mediterranean's southern shore have said "Enough!" to the status quo through revolutions that no one saw coming. Yet soft power and the model of multilateral dialogue are still the way to achieve political, economic, and energy cooperation, thereby ensuring a prosperous neighborhood that includes these countries and those to the east.

Relations with the Americas are different in nature. Here, proximity is not physical, but rather based on shared values and vision. In a constantly changing and complex world, coordinated action with the US must continue and progress. Moreover, impartial observers recognize that Latin America will be one of the great beneficiaries of the twenty-first century, and that closer relations between the two continents should be a key goal for both.

The EU has taken steps in the right direction, such as the creation of the European External Action Service under the Lisbon Treaty. My own personal experience tells me that where an ambassador of the EEAS is at work, the EU's influence grows.

As the EU aspires to become an international power, the choice is simple: either we Europeans act in unity to confront the tremendous challenges presented by the tumultuous changes now underway in the world order, or we doom ourselves to act as spectators in a world in which we have little or no say. Our prosperity and the viability of our socioeconomic model are at stake. That should convince us that Europe's states are too small to act globally on their own, and that European integration is the only viable path.

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