

## » A fragmented Europe that faces a leadership crisis

Madrid » 09 » 2016

**W**hat is happening? How are problems being focused? What solutions are there? Why is action not being taken? What is the purpose of our leaders?

When a society contemplates these types of questions, it is not a trivial matter. This is primarily due to a situation in which it is believed that not only is progress not being made, but that we are going backwards, and in light of events, the general consensus is that if decisions are not made, things could get worse.

It is never good to be aware of many things but to take little action. There is a problem here! And another one there! This goes on for countless challenges that become increasingly urgent until specific actions are carried out.

But how can action be taken without a comprehensive vision of everything? How can a partial element be resolved without focusing on the whole? Do we understand what we want to do together, in accordance with our needs?

The precision with which the Real Academia Española (RAE, the Royal Spanish Academy) defines the words of our language makes it possible to describe with certainty our perception of our surroundings. I have wanted to find a single word that, in my opinion, conveys the current situation and status of the European Union. A number have appeared after a bit of reflection: critical, tumultuous, delicate, perplexed, confusing, unsettled, disillusioned, tense, shaken, hazy, disoriented, troubled, disconcerted, bewildered, and dark.



Each and everyone can be used to describe the current state. The language spoken by 400 million people throughout the world is so rich, that the choice is difficult. “Confusing” is probably the word that best describes the events in the eyes of the citizens of Europe and beyond.

Europe has had to deal with difficult times in 2016. Although they are not the result of what has happened this year, major issues have coincided. A number of matters have existed for some time and have worsened, but others are new. Greece, refugees, security, terrorism, a shortage of economic drivers, a weakened Eurozone, and lastly, Brexit. This heavy menu is likely to cause indigestion.

At the beginning of his State of the Union<sup>1</sup> speech before the European Parliament this past September, Jean Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, stated that the European Union was going through an “existential crisis”.

In humans, this type of crisis usually occurs at the midpoint of our life expectancy. It is known as a midlife crisis, although in reality it covers a period that lasts until the age of 60.

During this time, people may question their existence, combined with their body’s biological changes.

Since 2017 marks the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties—a turning point in the creation of a united Europe—it can be considered as a sort of existential midlife crisis.

However, age is not affecting the European Union. It is too early in the night for this. It is a night, darkened by clashes and wars that thanks to an integration project, shines with the light of the longest period of peace and prosperity in history. Younger generations may not grasp the importance of this because they consider it to be a constant element that has always existed in their life.

The European Union must restore its best aspects. This refers to the identity that defines it and is based on the values it defends and promotes in order to build a model of coexistence based on peace and prosperity.

The citizens who comprise the Union must be the main focus of their leaders’ concerns.

These leaders must listen and be willing to assume the responsibilities that, in light of the challenges they face, must go beyond their term of office. Their decisions will like have a political cost due to their importance and weight. However, the European Union’s existential identity cannot be restored by only focusing on

<sup>1</sup> State of the Union 2016 | European Commission  
[ec.europa.eu/priorities/state-union-2016\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/state-union-2016_en)

the short-term electoral return of certain actions, without the determination and courage needed to make decisions that cannot be delayed, all in a continuously changing global context.

These leaders must serve as a reference thanks to the ethical principles and transparency of their decisions, with indestructible strength, despite the adversity they face.

These leaders must speak a language that can be understood by the men and women they want to convince of their well-founded goals, in line with their expectations. For example, using acronyms such as "SOTEU" is the best way to be understood? Dámaso Alonso was completely right! A poem he published in August 2003 that denounces the suffocating and oppressive use of abbreviations and acronyms in our language makes a valid point.

Visionary leaders must anticipate the changes faced by a constantly evolving world that is driven by information and communication technologies, and in which the multicultural aspects of humans are here to stay.

“These leaders must serve as a reference thanks to the ethical principles and transparency of their decisions, with indestructible strength”

This past June, Lukas Tsoulakis published an interesting reflection titled *¿Qué Europa queremos?*<sup>2</sup> (*What Europe Do We Want?*), which I support. However, due to the significant challenges being faced, I believe the question should be “what Europe do we need?” In other words, what are we lacking and how do we plan on addressing those shortages without the dangerous companionship of self-complacency, self-absorption, division, populism, and without unloading the evils of our inabilities on the omnipresent Brussels, as if we had no relationship with it?

In the extraordinary biography that Roy Jenkins (former President of the European Commission and Chancellor of the University of Oxford) wrote of Winston Churchill, one sentence about this iconic

person of modern history stands out: “The security and prosperity of Europe lies in its unity.”

<sup>2</sup> *Unión Europea: ¿Qué Europa queremos? (European Union: What Europe Do We Want?) | Op-Ed | EL PAÍS | elpais.com*



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