

Brexit: EU urgently needs new treaty

Written by Henri Malosse on 1 July 2016



Henri Malosse | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

The Brexit referendum should be seen as an opportunity to reform Europe and place citizens at the heart of decision making, says Henri Malosse.

I am very worried by EU leaders' initial response to the Brexit referendum.

I remember European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker saying his was the, "last chance Commission", which he told me during our first face to face meeting when I was appointed President of the European Economic and Social Committee. He said I should take his warning seriously.

Now is the time for Juncker, Merkel, Hollande, Tusk and others to take this opportunity to keep the European dream alive. We must not make the mistake of dismissing the Brexit result as an "English exception".

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Yes, there are many specific reasons for the outcome of the vote: ongoing doubts about Europe, the role of the media, politicians' lies and exaggerations, the island mentality. However, there have been other rejections via referendum across Europe: on the constitutional treaty in France and the

Netherlands, the first vote on the Lisbon treaty in Ireland and recently, on the EU-Ukraine association agreement in the Netherlands.

European leaders must address the root of the problem: the growing divide between the EU institutions and politicians, and citizens. Brexit, with its dramatic dimension, is a chance to tackle the real issue: Europe does not listen to its citizens.

The EU has become a huge, abstract and faceless structure, out of touch with the reality of people's daily lives. Even the European citizens' initiatives, a mechanism that was set up to better engage citizens, failed when the Commission dismissed three of them as irrelevant, even though they had gathered over one million signatures.

Citizens don't understand the EU structure, how it works or affects their lives. They value peace and stability, but all they see is bureaucracy and administration, social and fiscal dumping among EU countries, a lack of solidarity and an immigration catastrophe that no European leader has the answer to. A Europe without vision.

The EU needs a real wind of change, placing citizens at the heart of decision making, the engine of Europe. A new EU treaty is urgently needed. One which reforms, or even abolishes, the bureaucratic European Commission, reinforcing the powers of MEPs who are directly elected in constituencies.

A treaty which focuses on the founding values of the European Union: a fully functioning economy, prioritising education and jobs for the young generation, a strong and independent voice promoting peace, security and fundamental rights for all.

A new treaty would not take several years, it should take weeks. Napoleon Bonaparte said that "a good treaty needs one day for preparation and one day for signing."

We need leadership and an administration that is committed to working through the summer and delivering a simplified and relevant treaty that addresses citizens' concerns. It could be completed by October.

Each country would communicate the treaty's relevance to its citizens. Each country could take it to the people by referendum.

Of course, this is risky. But unless we place people at the heart of decision making, we will fail to deliver the right European project. Europe needs to be innovative and revolutionary - this our last chance.

About the author

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