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## **The former Prime Minister of Finland Alexander Stubb has called for the EU “to stand on the barricades and defend European values”**

Written by Martin Banks on 12 October 2018 in News  
News

Speaking in Brussels, Stubb, also a former MEP, sounded a warning about the risks of “more Brexits”



*Photo credit: PA Photos*

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Speaking of a “loss of hope and despair” he said the EU had to find solutions to issues such as migration and Europe’s economy.

“If not we’ll see more Brexits,” Stubb told a conference on the “state of Europe”, organised by the Friends of Europe think tank.

His comments come in the wake of a survey showing that nearly half of those quizzed think the EU is “irrelevant.”

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Speaking on the findings, ex-EU commissioner Pascal Lamy, a trustee of Friends of Europe, warned, “Without change and reform, the EU will remain irrelevant to a majority of its citizens.

Stubb is said to be an early frontrunner to become the next president of the European commission after next year’s European elections in May.

He is the formal Spitzenkandidaten candidate for the EPP and has currently on leave from his role as vice president of the European Investment Bank.

Speaking at the FoE event on Thursday, Stubb said, “I’m really trying to promote this next-generation-Europe thing.”

“We need more Europe rather than less Europe.”

A strong supporter of increasing European integration, he added, “So many are trying to lead through fear and hate. I’m seeing the incitement of fear and hate to drive migration and even to drive the labour market, and I don’t like that.”

“I would like to see a little bit more heart in Europe. We need to stand on the barricades and defend European values” Alexander Stubb

Stubb said, “I would like to see a little bit more heart in Europe. We need to stand on the barricades and defend European values.”

“If we don’t do this and we start moving towards an illiberal Europe, it’s going to be very difficult to come back.”

“I don’t want to see 2016 being seen as the beginning of the end of liberal democracy”.

“Some of the fears of the double crisis of the euro and migration were genuine and have to be addressed.”

“We need to find solutions to these problems. If not we’ll see more Brexit’s, we’ll see more Trumps. We need to disrupt liberal democracy a bit.”

“We are totally convinced that we will not build Europe if we don’t have more Europe and

better Europe. If you ask citizens, they don't think Europe protects them. They don't think Europe listens to them. They don't think Europe serves them" Muriel Pénicaud, French Minister of Labour

"A lot of people are on the verge of despair. There seems to be a loss of hope. Europe needs its own Obama moment or Trudeau moment."

Speaking in a session on "the politics of the future," he said, "This is Europe's moment. We need to fill those power vacuums left by US on issues such as trade and climate change.

"I always backed the theory that the next generation is smarter than the last. We need to move to reverse mentoring," added Stubb, who also said he supports a Europe-wide 16 voting age in European elections.

The search for urgent solutions to Europe's malaise formed the focus of Friends of Europe's annual debate, which drew over 200 influential figures from the world of politics, civil society and think tanks.

Louise Arbour, UN Special Representative for International Migration, said, "We should look at the question of whether Europe matters to the world and whether the world matters to Europe."

Participants examined policy reforms and ways to better promote policies to win back disillusioned voters. The scale of the problem was highlighted by a new Friends of Europe survey that showed 64% of Europeans are "not convinced that their lives would be worse" without the EU and nearly half - 49% - believe the EU is "irrelevant."

Muriel Pénicaud, French Minister of Labour, said, "We are totally convinced that we will not build Europe if we don't have more Europe and better Europe. If you ask citizens, they don't think Europe protects them. They don't think Europe listens to them. They don't think Europe serves them."

Several participants spoke of the need for a "strengthened social contract" to improve the lives of European citizens, particularly the young.

Jacques Bughin, director at the McKinsey Global Institute, told the meeting, "Inclusive growth is actually what citizens want, it's a key ingredient for the survival of our social contract. Europe has the power to continue to remain a welfare state."

Further comment came from Marijke Mars, a board member of Mars Incorporated, who said Europe "needs to up its game in promoting successful policies and making sure the public understands the positive impact of what the EU is doing."

"Marketing is not the EU's overriding strength. We need to convey our brand message every day. I'm convinced that brand Europe can recapture its market share in citizens' hearts and minds."

The FoE survey of 10,000 people found that Europeans are not sure the EU is working for them. Trust and ownership are key issues, with more than a third of Europeans calling for more transparency in how the EU is spending money, and 41% wanting to vote on EU-wide policy decisions.

However, under 35-year olds are the Union's biggest supporters, with 41% thinking their life would be worse without it.

When asked to choose what the main purpose of the EU should be, 27% chose 'Value Setter' or an EU that promotes values and democracy across Europe; 22% chose 'Global Balancer' - an EU that gives

Europe a bigger say in world affairs; 31% chose 'Market Maker' or an EU that improves economic growth for EU member states; 10% chose 'Transacter' or an EU that limits its focus to a free market for goods and services in Europe.

Some 90% felt that the EU should be more than just a single market; 81% don't think the EU should prioritise leaving more decision-making to national governments.

An FoE spokesman said, "The results show that there is consistency of view across citizens, regardless of age, gender, education and urban or rural splits of what the key issues are for the EU to contend with and what it should be about."

## About the author

Martin Banks is a Senior Reporter for the Parliament Magazine

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