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Europe Needs a Plan B Now!

EU founding myths and reality

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Historically, myths have served to explain complex concepts or to put together embellished versions of reality. The European Union has been built on plenty of myths. One of them tells us that 60 years ago, Europe came up with a plan: European countries would come together to ensure that the region's history of exclusion, xenophobia, and war is not repeated. The number of member states gradually increased, from six states to the current 28. Meanwhile, borders were opened for the exchange of goods, services, people and capital.

The myth tells us that the "founding fathers" (of course, there were no "founding mothers"; the European project wasn't born from a rib) built the project on the sound principles of democracy, solidarity and human rights. We mostly hear about Monnet, Schuman, Churchill or Adenauer. However, some of us prefer to remember Altiero Spinelli, an antifascist activist imprisoned by Benito Mussolini during World War II, who promoted a European federalist movement that could serve as an antidote to the destruction and horror generated by imperialist wars.

Today, we see walls that have been built with razor wire as well as with fear of others and fear of the unknown.

But today, with every passing minute, these founding myths seem more misleading. Just look at how Europe's borders are bleeding, and how fences emerge every other day! The fact is that the EU is responding to the largest refugee crisis in its history "and, possibly, its greatest challenge in decades" by building walls, installing mass detention centers, and compromising the rights and freedoms of both natives and migrants. Today, we see walls that have been built with razor wire as well as with fear of others and fear of the unknown. Walls that widen the gap between us and them. Walls that reinforce bolted identities and exclusionary nationalism. Walls that revive old ghosts, the same ones that haunted Europe decades ago, and the same ones that supposedly gave rise to that European dream.

Today, the EU welcomes tax havens, sponsors financial coups against its own member states, and negotiates free trade agreements, such as the TiSA or TTIP, behind closed doors, turning its back on the interests of its own citizens. Faced with the challenges of climate change, the increasing scarcity of resources, and the competition from other emerging powers, the EU reduces labor rights and social policies to compete in a global market. At the same time, it intensifies its aggressive foreign trade policy, and, for the sake of security and the battle against terror, it curbs the same rights and freedoms that terror seeks to destroy.

At a time when we need Europe the most, we are finding more internal and external borders. At a time when we most urgently need to translate the values of peace, prosperity and democracy into concrete policies, we are finding more wars, more cuts and growing xenophobia across the continent. We can already predict the results of this combination of impoverishment, savage capitalism, intolerance, and nationalism.

A change of course is not only possible or desirable; it is urgent and necessary. We need a democratic overhaul. Europe cannot continue living off its myths. Europe needs a plan B.

The EU claims to be a project designed to prevent the emergence of the ghosts that had plagued its past. It claims to have started with a dream. But the truth is that this dream has turned into a nightmare.

When austerity becomes the only political and economic option, this EU becomes a problem for the social majorities. Building a different Europe therefore emerges as the only solution to the precarious condition we are currently living

in.

The EU's current plan strays far away from the state of affairs envisioned in its foundational dreams. It is a plan that produces monsters and revives old ghosts. We know how that story ended. That is why a change of course is not only possible or desirable; it is urgent and necessary. We need a democratic overhaul. Europe cannot continue living off its myths. Europe needs a plan B.

This weekend, in Madrid, we have taken the first steps to change the Europe of merchants and war into a Europe of democracy and human rights.

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