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## **A Vision for Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

### **Summary of Discussions**

**An invitation-only roundtable,  
11 October 2005 at The Centre, Brussels**

#### **About the event**

‘A Vision for Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ was convened by E3G in association with The Centre, and the support of the Italian Ministry for Environment and Territory. The aim of the roundtable was to bring together two topics that are intimately linked but rarely discussed in concert: the future of the European political project and the role Europe can play in bringing about global sustainable development.

The premise for the two-part roundtable was that global interdependence offers an opportunity to revitalise Europe’s sense of identity and purpose. It looked at what this might mean in practice by considering the example of climate security: the overarching challenge of our time, equivalent in scale to food security two generations ago.

These discussions took place under the Chatham House Rule<sup>1</sup>. This summary is not a minute of the meeting but instead offers a flavour of the discussions.

#### **Overview**

The discussions at the roundtable revealed a shared sense that:

- The European project faces a true crisis, at the level of Europe’s direction and purpose
- The response needs to reflect a sense of purpose for Europe in a globalising world: it cannot be inward-looking
- The closely related issues of climate security and energy security provide one powerful lens on the wider problem, and on possible solutions
- The established system of European and national institutions and political parties cannot by themselves provide the political regeneration now necessary
- The ‘million signatures’ provision in the constitutional treaty may be worth exploring, perhaps in relation to energy and climate security, as one way of reengaging with Europe’s political base
- A renewed sense of purpose for Europe would need to offer a compelling narrative to give focus to current concerns about jobs and competitiveness

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<sup>1</sup> Chatham House London - When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.



## Panel 1: “What does global interdependence mean for Europe?”

### The provocation:

#### **‘Europe is a weapon of mass construction, but we don’t know how to use it’**

The choices Europeans make have consequences beyond our geographical borders. If we want to stay secure and prosperous in the 21st century, we must learn to manage those consequences. Otherwise we shall find ourselves increasingly responding to their unpleasant effects. We therefore need a platform for Europe as a driver in the global transition to sustainable development. And we must also show how a modified European project of this kind can address the concerns of Europe’s voters and taxpayers.

The current crisis should therefore be seen not as an institutional crisis but a political one – it is a crisis of leadership. The political base has changed since the beginning of the European project. Initially it was poor, so we could offer hope and opportunity, but now it is middle class and the key concern has now become the avoidance of threats to current prosperity.

### Two interesting illustrations:

- China believes in Europe more than Europe believes in itself.
- The Enlightenment was Europe’s most powerful export. Over the course of a generation it instituted two fundamental value changes. Firstly, it declared that there are universal principles that unite us all as individuals. Secondly, it changed our understanding of the environment from one mediated by God to one that can be understood through reason and science. These values are more important than ever as we face the challenges of globalisation and sustainable development. But they are now under threat, and Europe needs to respond.

### Key points raised:

- The origins of issues affecting our prosperity and security are increasingly to be found in geographic regions outside of Europe’s borders. This contrasts to the challenges of the past 50 years. These were inward-looking and could be addressed through political projects such as the development of the internal market. Now the challenges are external: maintaining prosperity in the face of global competition, security and terrorism, an unstable climate etc.
- The current problem is not about the constitution. It is about relaunching the EU project itself in the face of the challenges of today. As the EU’s successes in securing peace are now taken for granted by current generations its contributions are not



appreciated. The European project needs to be looking forward rather than back in order to offer a clear rationale for its existence. Europe succeeded in bringing peace within its borders – its mission is now to help do this for the rest of the world. In order to gain a sense of its role and position as a potential catalyst for change, Europe should see itself in the mirror of the world.

- More generally, the general challenge posed by globalisation and the search for competitiveness is leading to negative perceptions and reactions towards globalisation from European citizens. Europe needs to be able to respond in smarter and more positive ways if it is to avoid reinforcing this negativity. The Lisbon process is not doing this – it was originally developed in order to respond to competitive pressure from the USA, and is now thought of in terms of responding to China, but lacks a compelling and effective global vision.
- Given the forthcoming problems of access to natural resources (particularly water and energy) this must be a key component – Europe must lead in the shift from material to immaterial goods. We have the historical culture and values to support this, and are the only region able to do so – the USA won't. Europe's non-military approach appeals to citizens both inside and outside the EU.
- In line with the origins of the EU, which had its roots in energy policy integration (Coal and Steel Community, EURATOM) energy and natural resources would be a logical next step for regaining public understanding of the EU's relevance.
- However, citizens are no longer willing to trust their elites on the national level. This has a large impact on European affairs, as the EU has consistently been an elite project in the past. However, the same problems are increasingly affecting national politics, with a huge decline in political party memberships over recent years.
- Pressure is building for a democratisation of European institutions, but the lead will need to come from civil society – which now wants to be a producer of European policy rather than just a consumer of elite actions.
- The EU institutions cannot afford to sit and do nothing for a few years whilst reflection goes on. But they can also not be the leading actors in engaging citizens. Parliament could however have a particular role here.
- The need is to work at a much deeper level within civil society on the core issues underpinning our political life, linked to values.
- The provision in the constitution for the right to petition the European Commission will not be implemented in a cherry-picking fashion outside the framework of the constitution as a whole, but any initiative from civil society along those lines would push the limits of the possible – the Commission would need to respond.



## Conclusions from the first panel

There is a political crisis in Europe which requires creative thinking. The political project of European cooperation needs to respond to the external challenges of global interdependence. In developing solutions to these challenges it can develop fresh opportunities, thus providing a *raison d'être* for its existence to citizens. The desired democratisation of European institutions is an important dynamic that needs to be considered alongside any attempt to redirect European efforts.

## Panel 2:

### **“Climate Security, not food security, should be our budgetary focus”**

#### The provocation:

**‘A political project is not a theoretical exercise; it is about real solutions to real problems.’**

The EU has stalled, and needs to be inspired with a sense of renewal. The EU was developed with an eye to the past and the need to avoid the repetition of history. It now however needs to look forward and take on the challenges of the future.

Key example: climate security and energy security are intimately linked. Together they are the basis for prosperity and stability. Solving global problems such as these requires the pooling of sovereignty without losing identity – this has been one of the successes of the EU.

Europe has the resources available to meet the challenge, but needs to take a positive approach. Instead of taking a negative approach to globalisation (the threat of increasing competition), it needs to sell the positive response: acting smarter, investing, innovating, improving. A negative, restrictive approach cannot be sold to electorates.

Europe now needs to mobilise its resources. It has solved the problem of food security, so let's move to climate security problems. This would offer something to the world. A one million signature petition seeking a change in the EU's spending priorities would give focus to both the issue and Europe's democratic renewal.



**Key points raised:**

- Climate change affects us all. It is a security issue which every citizen can perceive. It is therefore an excellent subject for engaging citizens in the European project.
- Climate security and energy security are preconditions for competitiveness, food security, and even political stability. They have an important influence on the impact of natural disasters. Food security may in fact re-emerge as a significant problem due to climate change and the end of peak oil – it therefore doesn't make so much sense to set them up as opposites.
- Need to underline that climate security is key for EU competitiveness because of its links to energy efficiency and the development of alternative fuels. We need to invest in these adaptation measures. At present, the USA might actually be investing more.
- More generally, and given the rising cost of carbon, there is far greater scope for gains in competitiveness for the EU in driving carbon out of its economy than in reducing social protections.
- In terms of mobilising resources, it is more important to develop a coalition to push for a holistic deployment of resources for climate and energy security rather than getting lost in the current disagreements over the common financial perspective. It may be possible to bring together the resources currently devoted to both agriculture and fossil fuel subsidies. We need the equivalent of the Apollo project – serious resources to achieve our goals. We have the resources necessary for the task, but we are not applying them. This is especially true with regard to institutional resources.
- Tackling climate insecurity is also an altruistic action to help others on the planet.
- Climate security fails to be moved further up the agenda as issues are dealt with in vertical silos – not just in the European Commission and Member States, but also in civil society organisations. Climate security is not linked well to Europe's soft power. Those handling foreign, security and development policies must also be more involved, particularly given lack of interest from current European Commission. Member states are also failing to engage positively.
- Lateral thinking is needed. More problems of this type will be forthcoming as resource scarcity increases.
- A one million person petition carries with it dangers as a crude instrument of public opinion. A misinformed or manipulated public participation might be counterproductive. It could however be an effective tool to gain institutional attention from both Commission and Parliament.



## Conclusions from the second panel

The interlinked issues of climate and energy security are of crucial importance for Europe's future prosperity and stability, but are not being approached with sufficient urgency. A smart response from Europe on these issues could be a driver for improved competitiveness, job creation and citizen engagement. The resource requirements are significant to make this happen, and require the development of an effective coalition to push for change.

Given the interlinked nature of food security and climate security the framing of them as opposing funding imperatives is a distraction from the real need to reform our wider spending – and not just of the EU budget. A redirection of current subsidies to both agriculture and fossil fuels should be sought. This however is a larger landscape for change than just the current concerns over the common financial perspectives.

## Opportunities for further exploration

E3G will be working with others over the coming months to take forward some of the key learnings from the shared thinking undertaken at the roundtable. Some initial possibilities for further action include:

- Promoting the security – climate nexus within the European Commission, particularly in respect to foreign policy and its inter-linkages with internal policy
- Widening the conversation to include participants from more member states and sectors, and identifying possible participants in a coalition to promote action on climate security
- Developing the technical capacity to deliver an electronic one million signature petition together with an assessment of the coalition required to promote any future citizens campaign

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