

EUROPE MUST RISE TO THE CHALLENGES

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The 28 Member States of the European Union must rise to the challenges they face in the refugee crisis, in the economic and monetary crisis with its prolonged high levels of youth unemployment, and in the wars and trouble spots in their neighbourhood. None of these challenges can be resolved by one Member State alone; they all urgently require shared solidarity. The current crisis of solidarity which is paralysing Europe therefore needs to be overcome. In these difficult circumstances, the blame game is in full swing. But the situation is too serious for us to waste time on recriminations.

We want to look ahead together. We are convinced that the major tasks facing us must not be seen in isolation. Partial solidarity is not an option. Solidarity can only succeed when it takes into account the wider context, and it is only by taking this approach that we will find solutions. In this context, a strong Franco-German partnership and understanding is the foundation on which we can make progress.

We must be willing to give ground and even adopt positions with which we are uncomfortable for the sake of an overall compromise. The virtue of compromise, not national egoism, is what has advanced European integration over the decades.

What does this mean in concrete terms?

Firstly, the eurozone countries are willing to temporarily accept higher deficit limits for those countries suffering from high youth unemployment. However, this would remain linked to national reform efforts to achieve functioning markets, efficient public administrations, and good education and training.

Secondly, in its relations with Russia, the European Union is staying on its present course, which has so far been unanimously supported. This applies in particular to the criteria for lifting sanctions. Germany is willing to measure its foreign energy policy against the agreed European objectives and to discuss it in geopolitical terms. This includes reviewing Nordstream II.

Thirdly, the refugee issue is being addressed jointly. The 28 Member States are pledging appropriate contributions to stabilise Syria's neighbours, including by financing UN refugee aid. The policing of the EU's external borders must be organised and financed at European level. Cooperation with Turkey is important in this context, but we must not become dependent on it. Our cooperation with Turkey must take into account European principles, such as the rule of law, and European interests, such as promoting the Syrian peace process.

Fourthly, Schengen and a common asylum policy go hand in hand, as do the single currency and a common economic policy. That is why direct financial assistance is provided for border management, and for the registration, distribution and accommodation of refugees. Those who do not participate by taking in refugees must pay into a compensatory mechanism.

The crisis the EU is experiencing is not some natural phenomenon. It has a political cause, and a political solution is both possible and necessary. And so instead of hoping for one of nature's miracles, we are setting to work together. It's time to get started!

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