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Bertrand COLLOMB

Donald Johnston, you are the former secretary general of the OECD. You also chair a large European foundation. Despite the fact that you are the only North American on the panel, you told me that you want to speak about Europe.

Donald JOHNSTON

That is right, exclusively. Let me just say this to begin with. I want to talk about Europe and why the unity of Europe and the strength of Europe is critical to global governance. We had a discussion entitled the 'European Union: what next?' I want to talk a little bit about that: what next? Everyone appreciates that the very existence of the European Union is one of the most creative, remarkable creations of social, economic, and political policy in history given the violent history from which it emerged. Many of you are too young to remember, but when I first saw some of Europe in 1949 it was just beginning to emerge from the devastation of WWII. You cannot imagine what a miracle the post war evolution of Europe has been. That is too often forgotten.

I do not think a lot of Euro skeptics really understand how far Europe has come in such a short period of time and are quite prepared to see it unravel. I will return to that, as Euro skepticism is one of the real problems I have with many commentators.

I was inspired by something I came across by accident, written by historian H.A.L. Fisher in 1936. He was a British historian at Oxford, and wrote this about Europe at that time.

He began by describing the efforts to unify Europe: the failures of the Romans, of the Christian church, of Napoleon, and in his time, of Communist Russia. The latter was a concern in the '30s. This is what he wrote:

'Ever since the first century of our era, the dream of unity has hovered over the scene and haunted the imagination of statesmen and peoples. Nor is there any question more pertinent to the future welfare of the world than how the nations of Europe, whose differences are so many and so inveterate, may best be combined into some stable organisation for the pursuit of their common interests and the avoidance of strife'.

Unfortunately, Fisher died during the war, so he never lived to see his dream come true. But we have. Let us start with the remarkable Jean Monnet and creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951. It was the first building block of a united Europe, from which all else actually flowed. It was the acorn that grew into a mighty oak tree. However, let me draw your attention to language in the communiqué of the French government issued at the launching of the ECSC in 1951. It said: "the pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development, as a first step in the federation of Europe".

That word "federation" in the context of Europe is not always very popular today, but I am going to return to it because I think it should be popular. The ECSC was the first super-national building block of the European Economic Community and then the Union.



I find myself surrounded on the other side of the pond by many Euro skeptics who seem to delight in the fact that there is a Brexit, and they talk enthusiastically about the unraveling of the EU.

What troubled me greatly was a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*. It was written in the summer edition by a distinguished professor at John Hopkins University. This was what the professor had to say, which shocked me as much as Brexit had. Professor Jakub Grygiel wrote:

'The upside of the EU crisis created by Brexit will be a return to independent, sovereign states across Europe'.

Who will this be an upside for? It might remove the competition of the largest unified single market in history, which is Europe. Obviously, that might be an upside for those competing with it. It would possibly reinstate the possibility of future wars on the continent, which this great European experiment was designed to prevent, and so it has. Some of his comments appear to be designed to create a questionable impression of the attitudes of Europeans.

Here is part of his thesis.

"A Europe of newly assertive nation states would be preferable to the disjointed, ineffectual and unpopular Europe of today. There is good reason to believe that European countries would do a better job of checking Russia, managing the migrant crisis and combatting terrorism on their own than they have done under the auspices of the EU. "

What good reason? How is it that that good reason did not occur to Jean Monnet and the other people who were the builders of what has been, as I say, one of the greatest achievements of history. I found this attitude amazing. *Foreign Affairs* is very influential and prestigious. He went on at great length to explain why this would be better, never mentioning many of the notable achievements of the Union. The Euro is one, and research and development which exceeds that of the United States is another. There are many successes. You do not hear that. At least, you do not hear it in Canada and the United States.

Now a word about Brexit. There was only one country, the UK where the polls actually said a majority would support exiting the EU. There are many comments in the press and elsewhere saying the UK is really not the kind of member that originally began to build the Union. We know that the UK has always been a reluctant member.

Martin Wolf wrote that David Cameron took a huge gamble and lost. He says this is probably the most disastrous single event in British history since the Second World War. Many of you know Martin Wolf and that is a pretty strong statement coming from him.

He then says, 'The UK might not be the last country to suffer such an earthquake. Similar movements are elsewhere, and who is going to follow the UK over the cliff?' "

The polls suggest that that will not happen, although we hear a lot of talk of it, and it is very important that it does not happen, for many reasons.

A commentary in *The New York Times* pointed out that Britain is not a typical member of the union, as I said. Professor Grygiel's comments were also on the strength of patriotism, namely the extent to which citizens of members felt attachment to the EU. That is something that you may recall was addressed by Madame Guigou.

...lorsqu'elle [Madame Guigou] a dit qu'il faut que l'Union et le peuple se sentent plus proches.....

This European patriotism must be strengthened, and I think it will be strengthened. In fact, I was on a panel with Carl Bildt and others just a month ago in Korea, and Bildt made the point that there is evidence that the possible Brexit had strengthened the attachment of the French, the Germans and others to the Union itself. Obviously, they are



critical of it, but do not confuse criticism with wanting to leave. That is very important, and there are no polls showing that a majority in the remaining membership wish to leave the EU.

The following thought may seem controversial. Brexit might be good in some respects if the UK were to leave, because the UK has been a problem for the Union. I say that because of a comment by Jacques Delors to *Handelsblatt* in 2012. Jacques Delors has devoted much of his life to the European dream, both in public office and through his foundation in Paris. He made the following comment to *Handelsblatt* in 2012.

He said, 'If the British cannot support the trend towards more integration in Europe, we can nevertheless remain friends, but on a different basis. I can imagine a forum such as the European Economic Area or a free trade agreement. That might be a happy outcome should Brexit come to pass'.

I am not sure that it will, notwithstanding the comments by John Kerr, but the real beneficiaries of Brexit might very well be the remaining and new members. They will be inspired by people of the experience and quality of Jacques Delors.

There are members of the Spinelli Group, which was founded in 2010 as a network of politicians, individuals, writers and think tanks. They are looking to revive the momentum towards a federal structure for the EU. There is also evidence that the attachment of member countries to Europe, as I said, has been strengthened. At least, that was Carl Bildt's view.

What the Spinelli Group envisages would not be acceptable to the United Kingdom. It would be impossible, because the UK wishes to take the reforms in the other direction towards more decentralization, not towards more integration. I do not think that is what the European Union is all about. It was never intended to be a decentralized gathering of sovereign nation states. It goes right back, as I said, to the European Coal and Steel Community which looked forward to a federal structure of some kind.

I will remind you also of Maggie Thatcher, who seems to have inspired the Conservative Party. I know she is long gone, but she made a very famous speech in Bruges, you may recall, which resonated with everyone at the time. She said a lot of things, but there is one thing she said which I repeat as follows: 'Certainly, we want to see a Europe that is more united, and with a greater sense of common purpose. However, it must be in a way that preserves the different positions, parliamentary powers and sense of national pride in one's own country. For these have been the source of Europe's vitality through the centuries'.

That can hardly be seen as an endorsement of more integration, certainly not a federation, because full parliamentary powers are completely incompatible with a federal structure. She could have added as a matter of fact that the elements she wished to preserve are also the elements that have been the source of bloody conflicts throughout the millennium. These include three wars between France and Germany in the 70 years between 1870 and 1939.

My point is that no European country on its own will ever be a major global player by reverting to nation-state status, as recommended by this professor. Indeed, Carl Bildt pointed out that as other major countries grow in economic clout, not even Germany would be in a new G8. If Europe is going to have influence on the world stage as the largest economic block in history and help steer the globe to a better economic and social future, it will not happen without being strong and unified. I believe that Europe should play that role by moving gradually to a flexible federal structure.

Bertrand COLLOMB

Thank you for that invigorating speech in favour of Europe. We could use that, and maybe Hubert Védrine would like to comment at the end of the panel on this view of Europe.