

EUROPE IS COMING APART BEFORE OUR EYES

The continent faces its biggest challenge since the 1930s. We urge European patriots to resist the nationalist onslaught

The idea of Europe is in peril.

From all sides there are criticisms, insults and desertions from the cause.

“Enough of ‘building Europe!’” is the cry. Let’s reconnect instead with our “national soul”! Let’s rediscover our “lost identity”! This is the agenda shared by the populist forces washing over the continent. Never mind that abstractions such as “soul” and “identity” often exist only in the imagination of demagogues.

Europe is being attacked by false prophets who are drunk on resentment, and delirious at their opportunity to seize the limelight. It has been abandoned by the two great allies who in the previous century twice saved it from suicide; one across the Channel and the other across the Atlantic. The continent is vulnerable to the increasingly brazen meddling by the occupant of the Kremlin. Europe as an idea is falling apart before our eyes.

This is the noxious climate in which Europe’s parliamentary elections will take place in May. Unless something changes; unless something comes along to turn back the rising, swelling, insistent tide; unless a new spirit of resistance emerges, these elections promise to be the most calamitous that we have known. They will give a victory to the wreckers. For those who still believe in the legacy of Erasmus, Dante, Goethe and Comenius there will be only ignominious defeat. A politics of disdain for intelligence and culture will have triumphed. There will be explosions of xenophobia and antisemitism. Disaster will have befallen us.

We, the undersigned, are among those who refuse to resign themselves to this looming catastrophe.

We count ourselves among the European patriots (a group more numerous than is commonly thought, but that is often too quiet and too resigned), who understand what is at stake here. Three-quarters of a century after the defeat of fascism and 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall there is a new battle for civilisation.

Our faith is in the great idea that we inherited, which we believe to have been the one force powerful enough to lift Europe’s peoples above themselves and their warring past. We believe it remains the one force today virtuous enough to ward off the new signs of totalitarianism that drag in their wake the old miseries of the dark ages. What is at stake forbids us from giving up.

Hence this invitation to join in a new surge.

Hence this exhortation to carry once more the torch of a Europe that, despite its mistakes, its lapses, and its occasional acts of cowardice, remains a beacon for every free man and woman on the planet.

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Our generation got it wrong. Like Garibaldi's followers in the 19th century, who repeated, like a mantra, "*Italia se farà da sé*" (Italy will make herself by herself), we believed that the continent would come together on its own, without our needing to fight for it, or to work for it. This, we told ourselves, was "the direction of history".

We must make a clean break with that old conviction. We don't have a choice. We must now fight for the idea of Europe or see it perish beneath the waves of populism.

In response to the nationalist and identitarian onslaught, we must rediscover the spirit of activism or accept that resentment and hatred will surround and submerge us. Urgently, we need to sound the alarm against these arsonists of soul and spirit who, from Paris to Rome, with stops along the way in Barcelona, Budapest, Dresden, Vienna and Warsaw, want to make a bonfire of our freedoms.

In this strange defeat of "Europe" that looms on the horizon; this new crisis of the European conscience that promises to tear down everything that made our societies great, honourable, and prosperous, there is a challenge greater than any since the 1930s: a challenge to liberal democracy and its values.

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