



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Main messages: Citizens' Dialogue in Heidelberg

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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1. The time of the Troika is over

Getting the IMF on board in recent years was an emergency solution. In future, we Europeans have to be able to resolve our problems on our own.

People have the feeling that the Troika is working behind closed doors, not subject to any form of control, and that the IMF technocrats are miles away from any form of democratic control.

The Commission is the economic Government of Europe. Together with the European Central Bank and the Member States, we can make sure that, in return for solidarity, countries hit hardest by the crisis implement reform. We do not need the Troika for this. Its time is over.

2. Anti-crisis mechanisms: we need more democratic control

I strongly advocate incorporating both the Fiscal Compact and the European Stability Mechanism in the EU Treaties in the medium term, thereby subjecting them to the democratic control of the European Parliament. Sensitive decisions – be they about privatisations in Greece or joint taxation of income for married couples in Germany – cannot be left to financial experts who have no democratic legitimacy. Instead, there must be public debate in the European Parliament on whether lines of action are right or wrong.

3. Solidarity: Put the figures on the table

While the Germans complain loudest that they are shouldering the greatest burden in supporting the countries in crisis, the real picture looks very different: calculated on a per capita basis, it is the Luxembourgers who, under the European Stability Mechanism, are guaranteeing the highest amount per capita. Solidarity is not a one way street. The crisis countries, for their part, have implemented far-reaching and painful reforms in exchange for financial assistance: public sector pay in Greece, for example, has been cut by about 30%.

4. An alternative for Germany? For Germany there is no alternative to Europe!

Despite all the doomsayers, the euro is still there, growing strong and Greece is still in the monetary union. The euro is irreversible.

The benefits of the euro are evident. Studies have shown convincingly that, without the euro, real GNP growth in Germany would be about 0.5 percentage points less each year.

Returning to the deutschmark would cost about 200 000 jobs. Let's be clear: there is no alternative to Europe. Germany's future lies in Europe.

5. Youth unemployment: action instead of electioneering!

The EU is making available over €6 billion for the fight against youth unemployment, and the Commission has proposed to give priority to the funding of specific projects to get the money flowing as soon as possible.

However, we cannot content ourselves with mere pontificating. Youth unemployment cannot be downgraded to an electoral campaign topic. Instead of reiterating decisions already taken, governments in Europe should come up with specific projects swiftly.

I am wondering whether citizens should not take the lead and think about "solidarity sponsorships". Would it not be possible for citizens and businesses in economically better-off countries to somehow sponsor young unemployed people in those countries in economic difficulties? Citizens can see light at the end of the tunnel. In Europe debt levels are falling and competitiveness is increasing. We are getting to grips with the problems. We Europeans need to believe in ourselves more. We should whine less, roll up our sleeves and get on with it.

6. Data protection: a fundamental right in Europe

In Europe data protection is an important fundamental right. For us Europeans security and data protection have always been two sides of the same coin. Striving for greater security cannot mean that fundamental rights can be set aside. The only place that offers 100 per cent security is prison!

I am fighting to ensure high European standards for data protection that can also find acceptance internationally. Recent events confirm that strengthening European data protection is not a luxury; it is a necessity if we are to restore people's trust. Every day counts if Europe is to uphold its civil rights. I am counting on Germany's support. Germany, with its high standards of data protection, must play a leading role.

