

Guido Westerwelle: “We should not shy away from ambitious ideas like a European Constitution”

The European debt crisis has undermined confidence in the European project. Germany's foreign minister [Guido Westerwelle](#) argues that to solve this challenge, Europe must work together more closely and deepen integration. Europe must grow together; not at the expense of its countries and citizens, but in their service.



When discussing Europe today, the core question is: Will we succeed in overcoming the debt crisis? However, I believe it is time to think about Europe beyond the crisis. We need to consider how we can bring Europe forward as a political project.

The idea behind European integration was to overcome history by respecting territorial integrity yet making borders less and less relevant. Only a little more than twenty years ago, we witnessed the Berlin Wall come down and how Eastern European citizens' peaceful fight for freedom and self-determination eventually led to an end the decade-long division of Europe.

Based on the common values of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights, this integrated Europe has thus developed into one of the most prosperous and attractive regions worldwide.

So we should be all the more worried by the fact that the debt crisis has triggered the toughest ever crisis of confidence in the European project. Prejudices which we believed had long since been discarded have re-emerged. Doubts have been voiced about the very idea of Europe. We must counter them. We need to overcome the crisis and build new confidence in this European Project. That is the major task facing us in Europe today.

We are all in the same boat. And if this boat has to weather a

serious storm, we face two options. Either we let the boat sink. Then everyone will try to save his own life. Some of us will reach the shore in safety, but most of us will not. The second option is to work together, fix the boat and save everyone.

This is what we did in earlier EU crises. And this is what we are doing now. We are fixing the boat by enhancing the coherence of our financial and economic policies. Our clear answer to the crisis is to deepen integration. The solution to our present problems is not less but more Europe. If we are to succeed, we must assure ourselves anew of Europe's value. We must not forget that Europe has brought us unprecedented freedom, peace and prosperity. Above all, we must recognize that this Europe is – more than ever – our future.

The global order is undergoing radical change. The emerging economies are evolving into new centres of economic and political power, while the relative influence of individual European countries is declining. At the same time, globalization brings with it unprecedented challenges for shaping our world that do not respect borders. This applies as much to the regulation of the financial markets as it does to combating climate change.

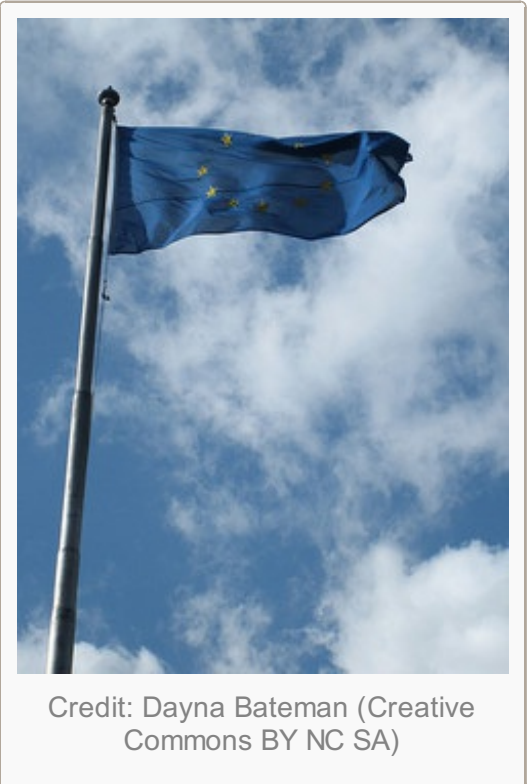
No European country can master these challenges on its own. We can only tackle them if we transform Europe to a truly global player. In this context, Europe is more than just the single market and monetary union. We are also more than the product of our history. We share a common culture. We are a community of values which must and should assert itself in the globalized world.

We believe that the values we cherish are universal. But we realize, too, that not all of our partners around the world share our views on the freedom of the individual, democracy and the social market economy. The barriers to self-fulfilment faced by young people today in St Petersburg are not the same as those faced by their contemporaries in Stockholm. Social security means something different to a pensioner in Boston than it does to a pensioner in Bordeaux. For someone running a medium-sized business in Mumbai, environmental protection may not have the same priority it has for his competitor in Munich. Europe will not convince its partners by preaching at them, but rather by setting an example by respecting individual freedom and shouldering global responsibility.

Today for the first time in history, the values we Europeans share are enshrined in the European Treaties. This marks the culmination of a centuries-long battle fought by courageous Europeans. In 1945 or 1989 these values were, for millions of Germans and Europeans, still the stuff that dreams were made of. Our achievements go a long way towards explaining why the European Union resonates so strongly with people beyond its borders. Its attraction depends on the credibility of the European community of values. For this reason, it is our bounden duty to uphold Europe's values in the future, both within the Union and beyond.

European integration has from the start been inspired by a unique idea: citizens and countries gradually transfer elements of their sovereignty to an increasingly powerful Europe. They do so in the firm belief that it is in their own best interest. Europe is growing together not at the expense of its countries and citizens, but in their service.

Now is the time for Europeans to stand together more firmly than ever and develop a joint vision of Europe's future. We must debate what kind of Europe we will need tomorrow to overcome the crisis



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and live up to the challenges of our global age. In this debate, we should ask ourselves: Can we afford to limit our vision of Europe to completing the Single Market? Or will the European project only remain viable if we forge ahead towards closer Political Union? In this debate, we should listen to each other very carefully. At the same time, we should not shy away from ambitious ideas like a European Constitution or a directly elected President.

In this endeavour, we must bear in mind what the past sixty years have taught us time and again: “More Europe” does not weaken us. It makes all of us stronger. Over the past months, Europe has proved that it has the vision and determination to go down this path – with very encouraging results. Faced with the challenges of our time, a vibrant Europe is in all our vital interest, not only in Paris, Warsaw and Berlin, but also in the City of London.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

About the Author

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Guido Westerwelle has been Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany since 2009. He was Germany's Deputy Chancellor from 2009 to 2011. Joining the Free Democratic Party (FDP) in 1980, he served as the party's General Secretary from 1994 to 2001. He was the chair of the FDP from 2001 to 2011. Westerwelle was elected to the German Federal Parliament (Deutscher Bundestag) in 1996.



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