

Europe – at 70, needed more than ever

To mark Europe Day tomorrow, and the anniversary 70 years ago of the Schuman Declaration, Christian Verschueren, Director-General of EuroCommerce issues the following statement.

“Tomorrow, we celebrate Europe Day. Seventy years ago to the day, Robert Schuman launched his call for laying the foundations of what is today the European Union. Only five years after the final coming of peace, he published his declaration in an unbelievably bold drive for solidarity with France’s previous enemy over the ages. It is worth remembering his words: *“L’Europe n’a pas été faite. Nous avons eu la guerre”*.”

The COVID-19 crisis is a war against a virus, mercifully not between people. Yet any crisis can make people forget the lessons of 70 years ago, and believe that they can gain an advantage over their neighbours by re-erecting barriers between people and countries. This fallacy is particularly dangerous in the present situation, where we face a recession potentially as bad as the depression of the 1930s.

It is easy to criticise the EU for the things it should have done, whilst at the same time not giving it the mandate or the resources to act. It merits, on this day, to pause on what the EU has done for all of us, European people and businesses, in terms of peace, protection, safety, choice, rights, exchanges, opportunities. And Schuman and Europe’s founding fathers would be astounded to see a Europe where countries, who once stood confronting each other across barbed wire and concrete, can now sit to find common cause to benefit them all.

Merchants and traders are dependent on supply chains which span Europe and beyond; they are the engine of trade and the bellwether of the whole economy. When consumer confidence is low, people buy less. If this leads shops to shut, industry cannot sell its goods. Investment, innovation, and progress stop. This can only be made worse if barriers among EU countries stop the single market working. With private consumption making up typically 50% of GDP across Europe, that matters to the whole economy - in every country of Europe regardless of its wealth or size.

That is why, with an uncertain future after the present crisis, all of us in Europe need, today as in 1950, to work together and make a European Union of cooperation and joint determination as the only way to build a sustained and sustainable recovery for Europe”.

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EuroCommerce is the principal European organisation representing the retail and wholesale sector. It embraces national associations in 31 countries and 5.4 million companies, both leading global players such as Carrefour, Ikea, Metro and Tesco, and many small businesses. Retail and wholesale provide a link between producers and 500 million European consumers over a billion times a day. It generates 1 in 7 jobs, providing a varied career for 29 million Europeans, many of them young people. It also supports millions of further jobs throughout the supply chain, from small local suppliers to international businesses. EuroCommerce is the recognised European social partner for the retail and wholesale sector.