



Hans Madej/afp

6

THE EU IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST MARKET

The four freedoms of the internal market (for goods, services, labour and capital) guarantee all EU citizens enormous consumer choice and good economic opportunities for employees and enterprises. Of course, that also entails having to face strong competition. Yet what might occasionally put strains on individual companies constitutes a permanent workout programme for European competitiveness from which everyone can benefit.



Jo Yong-Hak/Reuters

7

THE EU IS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

There is no other institution that has the power and the influence to organize the European continent. The association of 28 countries, the European Economic Area, the European Neighbourhood Policy towards the east and the south and the Strategic Partnership with Russia can all only be put into practice by a strong EU.

THE EU PROTECTS THE ENVIRONMENT

Although climate change was long ridiculed as the invention of a few excitable environmental activists, it has now begun and its impacts are evident in the Arctic just as much as in the Pacific. With its ambitious decisions to make binding reductions in the emissions of dangerous substances, to reduce energy consumption and to promote renewable energies, the EU is providing impetus for the world to limit global warming. The EU will not be able to achieve success alone, but without the EU it would be inconceivable.



Paul Langreck/Zem/afp

8

THE EU PROTECTS CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Although 24 official languages are a bane in its everyday business, the motto of the Union "United in diversity" describes a strategy that allows people and nations to keep their identity and helps them to live out and appreciate their differences. It is this wealth of cultures, diversity of mentalities, breadth of literature, fine arts and music and tolerance of different religions that make the EU a space in which everyone can find his or her place.



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9

THE EU IS THE HOME OF A SUCCESSFUL CURRENCY UNION

Many may greet this statement with scepticism, especially at this time. The difficulties of the currency union are manifest. However, we shouldn't reject the fundamental idea because of the momentary difficulties, since it involves much more than saving the exchange fees when we cross a border. Omissions were made in the implementation of the currency union that are now causing suffering among Europeans, and there were failings, too – above all, the fact that a number of countries of the euro area did not keep to the rules they had set themselves. Like any therapy, the present regime for the euro's recovery will be more painful than preventive measures would ever have been. Nevertheless, the efforts are worth it. With its single market, currency union, freedom of movement and shared values, the EU is creating a unique social interaction space for European citizens. The currency union is part of this idea, which is why, despite the current developments, Latvia introduced the euro at the beginning of 2014.

10



Peter Hiltl/afp

THE CONCLUSION

The European Union is very far from being a paradise. All the points mentioned here can be subjected to critical and very controversial debate and there is a need for improvement everywhere. The EU is not and will also never be perfect. However, it is the best thing that has ever happened to Europe. We must scrutinize it closely to improve it, but we should guard against talking it into the ground. What would the alternatives look like? Well, you could argue that things are also going well for the Swiss and the Norwegians. That's right, but it's also due to the European Union. They can develop in a democratic Europe because no wind blows behind the great rock of the EU. It is no coincidence that both countries have close ties with the EU through the European Economic Area (Norway) or numerous bilateral treaties (Switzerland). If the EU broke up, we would not all live like the Swiss or the Norwegians – not even the Swiss or Norwegians would continue living as they do now. If we do not want to start all over again in 1950 and painstakingly bring lots of competing countries together, we should not jeopardize the European Union.

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Picard/Bezzer/Reporters/afp

10 REASONS

FOR EUROPE

The member states of the European Union are:

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Author: Eckart D. Stratenschulte

The European Union (EU) is not only facing a currency crisis, but also a crisis of confidence. The approval curves in the polls have been pointing downwards over recent months. Does European integration still make sense? Many are asking this question. While the European Commission intrepidly promotes the new system of budgetary surveillance, people hear the news about summit meetings and euro rescue packages, which frequently involve disputes about the way out of the crisis, and about imminent or recently introduced financial and social cuts that are all somehow connected with Europe. The question “Do we still need the European Union?” may be asked – and it can still be answered with an unequivocal “Yes”.

Ten reasons are outlined here.

1

THE EU SECURES PEACE IN EUROPE

This statement is often belittled by many critics of the EU as banal, because peace is not threatened, at least not in the centre of the continent. Fortunately that is true – and this is precisely the result of European integration policy. However, it is by no means certain that this state of affairs would remain for all eternity if integration collapsed. Can you remove the foundation when a house has stood securely for 60 years?



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THE EU SUPPORTS WORLD PEACE

Our planet is plagued by wars, violence, hunger and disease. The EU cannot prevent all of that. Through its commitment to development cooperation and disaster relief, however, the EU contributes to solving these problems. The EU and its member states are the most important donors of development aid, they pay the lion's share of the United Nations budget and participate in appropriately mandated peace missions. Their partnership with the countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia aims at building sustainable economic structures there, curtailing corruption and supporting good governance.

THE EU GUARANTEES THE FREEDOM OF EUROPE

The European Treaties and the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights lay down clear rules to ensure that remains the case. Of course it is possible to point to populist movements in some EU member states whose attitude to democracy is questionable. However, the European framework prevents the collapse of democracy in one member country. A number of international organizations – such as the Council of Europe, NATO and the OSCE – have consultative parliamentary assemblies. Yet only the European Union has a fully effective and active Parliament that is directly elected by citizens, who can thereby also influence and legitimize the decisions that affect them.



Jonathan Kitchen/Photographer's Choice

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4



Reuters/Keystone/Schwarz/Jul

THE EU GUARANTEES FREEDOM IN EUROPE

A weekend in Warsaw, a job in Amsterdam, a vacation in France and studying in Estonia are just some of the things the EU makes possible. They mean much more, however, than being able to travel without controls. What is involved are general freedom of movement, harmonized higher education degrees, the transferability of pension entitlements, European health insurance and many other things that make modern mobility possible.

5

THE EU IS SHAPING EUROPE'S FUTURE IN THE WORLD

Globalization is unstoppable and is having a massive impact on Europe. New economic powers like the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) are demanding to have a say in the world order. That cannot be denied them. If Europe and its positions are to continue being heard in the global political process, this will only be possible in a European chorus, not individual national voices. Incidentally, the G20, which is increasingly becoming a central control forum of globalization, consists of the 19 most important industrialized countries and the EU.



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