



Philippe Herzog, former Member of Parliament European and Advisor by the Commission, President founder of Confrontations Europe

# A NEW NARRATIVE FOR EUROPE

*"A New Narrative for Europe" is a critical and engaged essay by Philippe Herzog, a project that could be summed up by the following declaration: "A European political project is not an obligation but a choice. I always fully embrace it, and that's why I want to contribute today to the refoundation of our Union in a radically new context compared to its origins."*

**T**he European project is a complex system, made up of multiple interactions. The process of European integration is both profoundly concrete in that it directly affects our daily lives and abstract, as it is the result of ideas, a diverse history, and narratives. Its materialization in the form of the European Communities and then the European Union is subject to a lack of definition. What will the EU

become? We have the choice to ponder the meaning we want to give to the European project, and this is what Philippe Herzog invites us to realize here. Kundera speaks of points of no return in human life and of modern people who cheats by seeking to ignore these moments. Yet, if we consider the European Union today and structural challenges for which we must find solutions, we may be

at a moment where we can acknowledge a point of no return and project ourselves towards the future, towards a consensual political project whose original purpose, as stated in the Treaties, is to create an ever closer solidarity among peoples.

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## ACQUIRING AND SHARING A HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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**Confrontations Europe: The European motto is "United in Diversity," but you believe that the Union as an institution fails to bring together populations, notably due to the relegation of the role of culture and education. For you, there is a need today, on the contrary, to rethink European education and to become aware of the importance of culture as a cornerstone of the European political project. What would you propose today to promote, consolidate, regenerate, this common European consciousness? What are the obstacles?**

**Philippe Herzog:** The unity of Europeans in their diversity was a centuries-old task, and Europe first united through culture. However, in terms of political organization, it was fragmented into feudalities, states, rival, and bellicose empires. That is why the creation of an economic community, after the two world wars, was a remarkable innovation. But the idea of a federal political community is now lost sight of. European nations want to remain nations, and wanting to imitate the United States of America is a mistake; we need to federate differently. Currently, our nations wish to remain in the Union more out of interest than out of a desire to form a society together. This is not inevitable, but the failure of the teaching of European history is evidenced by the work of the Council of Europe. It is a renunciation that leads to national retreats and tensions between Europeans who do not recognize each other. And this hinders the effort to acquire a common consciousness at a time when there is a great need for a new vision of the world.

European humanism has lost its vitality; fears, dualisms, and indifference are taking hold. The deficiencies and biases in the education of leaders and in the public information space are significant handicaps. I call for a

major effort in reeducation. This is not about reforming competencies in treaties or centralized decisions; I believe more in the proliferation of grassroots initiatives and associative experiments, as was done after the Second World War with movements like "People and Culture". At Confrontations Europe, we have always aimed to build Europe from the ground up: winning the hearts of workers and the humiliated populations who vote for the National Rally, rooting awareness in localities, creating cross-border mobilities to share narratives and training.

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## BECOMING A FORCE FOR PEACE AND COOPERATION

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**C. E.:** To become a force for peace and cooperation, it requires not only the will but also the means. In your book, you analyze the situation of the global economy, emphasizing the importance of a retrospective view on economic cycles in the history of capitalism, and a prospective view on long-term investments and means to create conditions for a sustainable and just recovery.

**A major problem you identify is the distribution of roles between the private and public sectors, as well as in the values we attribute to capital and labor: how to change the paradigm within the EU where that of free competition continues to dominate?** ▶

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► **Ph. H.:** Capitalism is an economic system that is constantly evolving, and some crises have a systemic nature that can only be addressed through profound structural transformations. This was the case after the Second World War, with the massive intervention of the state in the economy, and it remains the challenge today. However, we cannot simply replicate the solutions of the post-war boom years. States are c with social tasks and solidarity within nations, heavily indebted, and public service infrastructures have aged considerably. Meanwhile, the EU stifles cooperation and solidarity with its choice of intensified internal competition, and it does not fulfill its duty of long-term investments in the general interest. The gap between capital and labor has never been greater, with large corporations and global investors reigning supreme, to whom we have entrusted our fate. We must recreate public and social control of the economy, which will be based on complementarity between local, national, and European levels. Otherwise, the inefficiency of current management is glaring: over the past few decades, there has been a massive financial and monetary bloating in Europe (as in the United States), but human and productive underinvestment has been significant. A coordinated planning effort between states and The Union is indispensable for long-term investments in the form of cross-border public-private and associative partnerships. This requires a European budget, patient Euro-

pean financial industry, and an industrial strategy based on cooperation.

**C. E.:** The ECSC was pragmatically created through the coal and steel sectors to prevent war from recurring. Today, we talk about industrial sectors that hold promise for the future and the need to establish a new industrial pact aligned with the Green Deal. Do you think this message could be a vector of hope for a European political project?

**Ph. H.:** Precisely, the ECSC consisted of organizing industrial solidarities for essential goods in post-war reconstruction and growth. Jean Monnet was a planner, not an advocate of the common market. The common market was Germany's primary demand, an industrial powerhouse striving to become a major global exporter. Like the British, it has always hindered European industrial policy. The Green Deal relies on often inconsistent and ineffective obligations and incentives. An ecological industrial project is essential to regenerate habitat, employment, and production in the Union's territories, and to adapt them to climate change, rather than relying solely on future miracle technologies to decarbonize the economy. We must not underestimate the costs, risks, and the sacrifices it implies, but we must be willing to share them in order to reduce them and systematically value the development of skills and solidarity. This indeed involves building industrial sectors, trans-European infrastructures, and information networks. The revival of nuclear energy is, from

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this perspective, good news, a major asset for decarbonizing the economy.

**C. E.:** *At a time when the EU is seeking its position on the international stage, when we tend to focus on a competitive and complex geopolitical landscape that takes the form of a patchwork, you argue that the EU could play a “bridging” role in international relations: how and with what means? Do you think this role would be accepted by other major powers?*

**Ph. H.:** The vocation of Europe is peace, which great men of the past have wanted to be “perpetual,” let us say durable. We must not lose sight of this while multiple and interconnected war zones exist in today’s world, and there is a risk of world war. Also, the “strategic autonomy” that we desire for Europe does not simply involve defense means but a positive vision for world peace. The war in Ukraine is a test in this regard. I reject the bellicose Roman maxim “if you want peace, prepare for war.” Because without preparing for lasting peace, we will never end war. Welcoming Ukraine and several Balkan countries into the Union are a duty, as is preparing the prospect of cooperation and a security agreement with Russia as well. If, here as elsewhere, the Union is not capable of being a mediator in conflicts, other powers will take on that role. And farewell to its autonomy. Europe is caught in the grip of the confrontation between major powers, the United States and China. Locking itself into the logic of the Western bloc can only worsen its situation. It must choose non-alignment and strengthen its economy with the will to meet the immense cooperation needs of the populations of the Global South, where the world’s youth resides. It has invested truly little there, and the resentment towards the West runs deep. Reversing this trend is a truly “strategic” task.

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## TOWARDS a NEW ERA OF DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE

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**C. E.:** *We must implement profound structural changes in our societies, yet these changes involve transitions that weigh on the population, especially considering the social*

*and economic inequalities that tend to widen. In this context, how do we define common goods and objectives at the European level?*

**Ph. H.:** Common goods include diversity - Europeans have plenty of it - we must turn it into wealth; it is humanity to be reconciled; it is the harmony of our relationship with nature to rediscover. Concretely, this requires the Union to assume co-responsibility with the states to restore public goods and build transnational ones in all areas, starting with education and healthcare, energy, and food...

**C. E.:** *And do you think democratic time is compatible with the urgency of action?*

**Ph. H.:** A true political project indeed requires a period that is stable and long enough. Today, the sense of acceleration mainly reflects doubts about our capabilities. The Union is not inactive, but changes must be carefully evaluated. Thus, it has acquired borrowing capacity but lacks a budget. It increases its military spending through national channels (German, Polish...), but for what purpose? Interesting regulations are emerging for the digital realm, but achieving European mastery for data processing and sharing remains a fiction. It may be said that the glass is half full, but it would ignore that to see further, there is a major bottleneck: the technological governance of the Union. By the way, switching to qualified majority voting would not be a panacea. I advocate for the multiplication of permanent structured cooperations among willing states in the industrial domains of public goods. And the creation of a political authority with governmental functions. Because neither the Commission nor the European Council, always ready to pat themselves on the back, can self-reform and become the “masters of the clock.”

**C. E.:** *You revisit the history of European construction throughout your work, and what is striking is the notion of solidarity. Does it still have meaning, and could it be reconsidered to once again become the foundation of the European political project?*

**Ph. H.:** Yes, solidarity should be reconsidered. Neither Germany nor France has a culture of it, and each one practically hinders it, except for its own interest. As for community law, it acts as judge and arbiter in the absence of a political will for common policies. Solidarity implies ►

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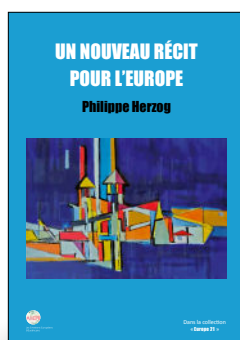
- fraternity in our commitments. We can then go beyond technocratic governance and build a partnership and multi-national democracy.

**C. E.:** One last question, as the founder of *Confrontations Europe*, you address in this book the reasons for the creation of this think tank (notably to ensure that different viewpoints and conflicts are expressed in a viable and constructive manner). Do you think that think tanks have their rightful place at the European level to assert this key role as mediators establishing bridges between seemingly irreconcilable points of view? Do you identify other key actors who facilitate the weaving of these links between different stakeholders at the European level?

**Ph. H.:** Most think tanks play the role of experts to institutions, but they are not mediators between them and citizens. *Confrontations Europe* was founded as a movement of civil society bringing together public and private actors, companies, and communities to become a collective actor in European construction. It involves citizens through dialogue, critically evaluating institutional policies, and opens up a perspective for future restructuring. I thank Michel Derdevet and his team for the sustainability of this association. Yes, we want to be a bridge between different viewpoints, and we work towards a European sense of community.

**C. E.: If you were to formulate a wish for European citizens during the next term of Parliament, what would it be?**

**Ph. H.:** I wish for them to be more engaged through a revitalization of associative movements. More demanding of their elected representatives, they must call on them to transcend their partisan interests to serve the common good. The next Parliament should not turn into a brawl, and to stem extremism, there should be a constructive pact among all those who want to cooperate for the renewal of the Union. The Parliament should not only produce directives but also contribute to re-thinking the idea of federation. ■



## PHILIPPE HERZOG

### **A New Narrative for Europe**

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For decades, Philippe Herzog has been driven by the desire to make European culture a political issue. Nourished by multiple research and experiences, he has devoted several essays to this cause. The one we publish today enriches the previous ones by presenting a vision for the future and original proposals on the eve of the 2024 European elections. "There is no longer a project for political union, and the debate on this subject is at a standstill," he writes. He calls on Europeans to regenerate it. Acquiring and sharing a historical consciousness is paramount. However, Europeans are unfamiliar with each other, and the teaching of European history is dwindling. The choice is between resignation and reeducation. The will to participate in making history with ideals of perpetual and universal peace would rejuvenate Europe in today's world. Deeply reconciling European nations and the Union is essential, requiring us to transform our democracies into partnership and multi-national ones. Utopia? Always in search of transcendence, Philippe Herzog concludes, "When Europe is at risk of sinking, isn't realism about joining audacity with imagination?"

An esteemed economist, politician, and essayist, Philippe Herzog, a graduate of École Polytechnique and a university professor, co-invented the first French economic forecasting model. After a long tenure as a leader of the French Communist Party, he founded Confrontations Europe with Michel Rocard in 1992. A Member of the European Parliament from 1989 to 2004, then advisor to the European Commission, he was appointed an honorary member of the Jean Monnet Foundation (in Paris and Lausanne). As the co-founder of the Open World Film Circle, Crossed Looks with his partner Claude Fischer Herzog, he works on a policy of global civilization.