

Jeremiah Day was scheduled to exhibit at the art center from June 3. Given the current health situation, his exhibition *"If It's For The People, It Needs To Be Beautiful," She Said* has been postponed until the start of the 2020 school year.

He suggested that we publish this open letter, written by the artist with input from and co-signed by Fred Dewey and Wolfgang Heuer, whom Day worked with in the past on the series "What Was The European Union?"



Organized in anticipation of the European Union summit on economic recovery to be held this Thursday, April 23, 2020, it echoes his exhibition project, a central problem of which is as follows: how to achieve citizen engagement in favor of the common good?

Antoine Marchand, director centre d'art Le Lait, Albi (France)

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Open letter to the European Council, and our friends and colleagues.

Corona and the Future of Solidarity in Europe

We write to address the future of solidarity in Europe, and so the future of Europe itself. On April 9th, a patchwork solution to a massive health crisis and its effect on national budgets was agreed by the Eurogroup. Its meaning is basically unclear. On April 23, the leaders of Europe will discuss how to preserve the "well-being of all Europeans" in the face of this crisis. Without bold steps renewing Europe's founding premises, there is a likelihood that economic crisis, with only patchwork solutions, will lead to a much more serious, even fatal European political crisis. This impending crisis in Europe is hardly just of economies or health conditions, but of the European concept itself.

Recent actions of the governments of the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Finland to loudly refuse to consider concrete mutual support – what was called the EuroBond, and now, responding to the health crisis, the Corona Bond – seems to us to go against the very principles the European Union was built on. Paying lip-service to "solidarity," while at the same time offering no such thing, seems to some even more extreme. The Portuguese Prime Minister no doubt spoke for many when he called such evasive proposals "repugnant." It seems that some have too little appreciation of the extent to which our fates are profoundly inter-twined, and how such "proposals", if enacted, will encourage serious political conflict. This could lead to moves either to break away from the common currency or significantly strengthen movements calling for that. Withdrawal of a second or third Eurozone country, in the face of a renewed heavy hand, could undo the very premises of the currency and so not just the European economy, but those dependent on trade like the Netherlands, and exporters dependent on a depressed currency value, like Germany and France. Without the common currency, serious harm to trade and massive inflation could come to the lead countries of Europe – in this case, threatening the historic foundations of Holland, France, and reviving the traumatic history Germans have so uniquely pursued austerity to avoid. This is hardly to single out Holland, France or Germany. Other countries have played their part. All would suffer the grim results.

At the same time, it is positive that forces in civil society now emerge where they were absent – especially in Germany and the Netherlands – that would make mutual support more politically feasible. This shifting landscape of conflicting public opinion reveals the need for more than

another imposed technocratic solution on the 23rd, and instead call for a wider citizens' debate on the meaning and substance of solidarity in Europe. The time is past due for us to discuss whether Europe as an alliance of equals, as envisioned at the beginning, makes sense anymore. We believe it most certainly does, now more than ever. The growing suffering and fear of millions is proof.

The European Parliament in Brussels is named for the Italian Altiero Spinelli. The blueprint for the peaceful, prosperous open society that we enjoy today was penned in an Italian jail. To recall this now is hardly sentimental. It is a reminder that solidarity was conceived as the foundation of a European economy then, and its renewal can be the only way forward now. It is quite likely that there were some in 1946 who did not want to forgive the states that produced totalitarian catastrophe. But Spinelli and the anti-fascist partisans across Europe knew that forgiveness was a necessary part of the plan for European solidarity and economic revival. The choice today is equally stark – enduring meaningful solidarity and peace, or short-term chauvinism and self-destruction.

For ten years, the case has been made that enabling a common debt to provide for common solidarity would create “moral hazard”, indeed there were good arguments that binding the finances of all in an action to support one very de-stabilized neighbor might indeed imperil the greater good. A Europe-wide debate on “social Europe” and political-economy is overdue. But what has gone ignored is another “moral hazard”: that blocking Eurobonds and now Corona Bonds could more intensively fuel nationalism and the abuse of shared institutions by factions and countries in Europe who would seek to impose political models on others. What would be lost is respect for political equality and a feeling of having solved injustice with our common project, stoking in particular a memory of certain nationalist ambitions that likely contributed to Brexit. The absurdity of proposing to send in accountants to police finances while the dead and dying overflow hospitals into the streets of Europe's great cities is obvious, as is the violent resistance to such “conditionality” as some have now begun calling for.

Devastated by the pandemic but without control of their own currency, Italy and Spain cannot solve their problems as other such countries can. Italians and other countries increasingly wonder if the EU has become an obstacle rather than a support on their road to recovery – although a tenuous majority in those countries still support the EU and the shared currency. If they were to go down the road toward new currencies – as increasingly loud elements wish to – this would likely destroy the Euro. On the other hand, tackling the costs of the crisis solely on a national level could well lead to national defaults. This could in turn default the whole currency. Even if a default is avoided, looking ahead, it is easy to imagine the Union devolving into factions along old and new fault-lines, with boycotts or worse against those who would be perceived to have betrayed mutual defense in a moment of unprecedented pandemic and stress.

We believe that when Europeans stray from meaningful solidarity, they are not being “selfish” but self-destructive. The technicalities of debt or investment cannot be used to cloud what faces us now: a global pandemic that has already led to financial crisis shared by all. Common, mutual, shared action is pivotal. The point is hardly charity, but rather coming together in self-defense to solve shared concerns: public health, borders, lockdowns, elections, civic freedoms, rights, and preservation of prosperity and union for when the crisis facing us is over.

It has been said that the European Stability Mechanism is toxic because of its association with the Eurocrisis, and perhaps the same is true for Eurobonds. Thus, on the agenda for April 23rd ought to be development of a new, concrete, and irrefutable form of solidarity, among those of us active in public life, but also among our political leaders. They must demonstrate their concern for shared peace and well-being, a demonstration needed if we are to emerge from the difficult months ahead intact.

To our friends and colleagues, we must cast off silent acquiescence and tacit support of self-destructive actions imperiling our common futures. At this point, Europe is an island of open society, freedom, mutual exchange, and alliance that must be defended. We the citizens must come up with new forms to defend this precious project and its unique example benefitting us all. Great damage has already been done. This is not the time to back off and retreat to bunkers. First, we must pick up the phone, write our representatives, and tell our colleagues: new forms and bold steps towards solidarity in Europe on April 23rd, or we will surely plant the seeds of perilous ruin.

Jeremiah Day (Berlin), Fred Dewey (Brussels/Los Angeles), Wolfgang Heuer (Berlin/Madrid)

Day, Dewey and Heuer co-organised the project “What Was The European Union?”, a series of public forum on the roots of post-war European federalism in the resistance movements of the second world war.

Co-signers are welcome.

To support this effort, please write to the European Council, regarding the April 23rd meeting: reception.desks@consilium.europa.eu