



Jean Quatremer at AEIDL: "Juncker team can only do better"

(12 December 2014) - Jean Quatremer, a journalist with *Libération*, shared with the members and the team of AEIDL his views on the prospects of the European Union. The EU is in bad shape, but by being proactive and more open to the press and the public, the new EU leaders seem determined to "make things happen".

This Friday, AEIDL inaugurated a cycle of internal conferences. Every three months on the occasion of its strategic brainstorming days, a specialist in European issues will be invited to speak with AEIDL's members, team, experts and other people close to the association.

Jean Quatremer, the Brussels correspondent for the French daily *Libération*, was the first to respond to the invitation. It was an excellent start. For more than two hours, this veteran of European affairs of 20 years revealed his vision of the European Union, its institutions and its prospects.

"A new breath of fresh air has been blowing in Brussels for some time", and the Van Rompuy-Barroso-Ashton trio has given way to "a very political, very pragmatic team that wants to get things moving".

According to Jean Quatremer, the new leaders, the Juncker-Tusk-Mogherini trio, represent a "dream team" compared to Herman Van Rompuy (who "completely ignored Russia in the EU-Ukraine negotiations"), to Manuel Barroso ("who was never wrong ") and to Catherine Ashton ("who was diplomatically non-existent").

While accredited European correspondents provide the best way for the EU to have a credible voice in the Member States, the former leaders tended to "stay in their bunker", with very little communication with national mass media. "It therefore comes to no surprise that public opinion throughout the EU considers that 'for all that is painful, it is Europe's fault'," said Jean Quatremer.

The new EU leading team seems in contrast more open and better structured for action. "Jean-Claude Juncker will focus on domestic affairs, Donald Tusk on the outside (in this regard, the appointment of a Polish president of the European Council is a strong symbol sent to Russia) and Federica Mogherini, who unlike Catherine Ashton has chosen to take up

office in the Berlaymont building, has already shown that she intends to coordinate her direct Commissioner partners on the economy, neighbourhood relations and international cooperation. As for Mario Draghi at the head of the European Central Bank, he seems "determined to promote the euro zone recovery" said Quatremer .

But the new team needs to address some serious challenges. The EU is facing three major threats: a dangerous Russian-Ukrainian crisis, the eurozone's imminent entry into deflation, and shared 'europhobia' – not to mention 'germanophobia' – across the Union.

Nevertheless, Jean Quatremer remains optimistic. Being positive is in his nature and in his European Lorrain DNA, and the facts support this outlook. Juncker's investment plan can be a good lever for growth, the ECB seems to be ready to buy the sovereign debt of the banks in the eurozone and, structurally, "no one can disagree with the fact that the EU has ensured peace for over 50 years and that this is already a great achievement". For Quatremer, even the current tensions with Russia are not totally negative. "Europe has always needed threats to progress," he said. There is an urgent need to "renew the European narrative" and education has a great role to play in doing so.

The questions and discussions that followed (topics included the British referendum, LuxLeaks, the democratic deficit of the EU institutions, the inequalities and dysfunctions of the Internal Market, Islam in Europe and the role of local initiative) were particularly rich and participants were unanimous in wishing to repeat the experience soon with another charismatic [observer of the European scene](#).

Understanding Europe on different levels allows AEIDL to maintain and even examine its values, as well as to provide context for further action.

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