The Brussels-based independent think tank celebrated its 20th anniversary on 13th October 2016. High-level speakers, including three EU Presidents, debated and engaged in intense discussions about the future of the European project in Brussels. KBF has been the European Policy Centre’s strategic partner for 14 years.
“Only people with hope can change things. Europe needs both change and hope.”

EPC PRESIDENT HERMAN VAN ROMPUY

The European Policy Centre (EPC) brings together business, civil society, government and diplomatic representatives, politicians, institutions and academics to address the multiple critical issues facing Europe.

According to EPC President Herman Van Rompuy, “The most important task for the EU in the upcoming years is to reconcile European citizens with the European project, knowing that national governments also have to face this rift between the electorate and the leaders.”

EPC - an important intellectual input

Van Rompuy, President Emeritus of the European Council and former Prime Minister of Belgium, said: “We need to build bridges between Europe as a place that protects people against threats such as unemployment, irregular migration, terrorism, excessive inequalities and climate change.”

He added that the way forward is to find a new consensus comparable to the social market economy after the Second World War. “We need a new sense of compromise, of moderation, of the general interest. The EPC can have an important intellectual input. It can stimulate the debate and even inspire. Renewal starts with ideas and ideals,” Van Rompuy said.

A regressive and ‘illiberal’ Europe?

Van Rompuy was joined by European Parliament President Martin Schulz, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and European Council President Donald Tusk. Their ‘hard talk’ focused on the potential threat of the emergence of a regressive and ‘illiberal’ Europe, particularly in the wake of Brexit last June, when 52 per cent of voters in the United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union.

Tusk made a passionate plea for a Union based on the principles of liberal democracy. “The brutal truth is that Brexit will be a loss for all of us,” he said. “There will be no cakes on the table for anyone. There will be only salt and vinegar. The only real alternative to a hard Brexit is no Brexit.”

Janis A. Emmanouilidis, EPC’s Director of Studies, noted that all speakers emphasized the need for more solidarity and trust. “They acknowledged that with the rising spectre of populism and anti-democratic forces across Europe, the stakes are very high.”

Europe needs “change and hope”

In closing the 20th anniversary debate, Van Rompuy delivered a positive message of hope. “Combating polarization, aggressiveness and hate while promoting values, dialogue, moderation, compromise and compassion is key in the counter-offensive to restore cohesion and integration, stability and hope.”

Van Rompuy added: “We must turn fear into hope. Only people with hope can change things. Europe needs both change and hope.”

A close and interactive partnership

The high-level debate was a fitting way to celebrate EPC’s 20 years at the helm of shaping European policy. In preparation of the conference, Janis A. Emmanouilidis and Fabian Zuleeg, EPC Chief Executive, prepared a paper analysing the current state of, and prospects for, the European Union (“EU@60 – Countering a regressive and illiberal Europe”).

EPC’s Janis A. Emmanouilidis notes that Europe’s current political malaise is on the rise, which makes EPC’s work even more meaningful. “Over the past 20 years, EPC has provided input to the debate and brought together different stakeholders to contribute ideas and proposals to European integration,” he says. “The future is increasingly uncertain, unclear and complicated. EPC is helping to steer the debate, provide orientation and come up with analysis and proposals to explain and address this complexity.”

KBF’s strategic partnership with EPC is very close and very interactive, says Emmanouilidis. “Without KBF’s support, we wouldn’t be able to do the work EPC is doing. As strategic partners, we are able to engage in long-term cooperation, which makes it much more beneficial for both sides.”

A NEW PACT FOR EUROPE

The New Pact for Europe project is driven by KBF and a group of European foundations, together with the EPC. Launched in 2013, the objective is to foster debate and develop strategic options for reform to secure Europe’s future. For more information, see pages 20-21.