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| Former European Commissioner Pascal Lamy shares his views on Europe and the Union.

# EUROPE'S DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT IS ANTHROPOLITICAL

Interview with Pascal Lamy, President Emeritus of the Jacques Delors Institute  
By Alain Bloëdt, Editor-in-chief of the Progressive Post

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— Will increasing the competencies of the European institutions, such as the Commission, or indeed the creation of new bodies, for example a euro zone parliament, strengthen European democracy?

**PASCAL LAMY:** I don't think so. If the EU went to see an "Institutional Doctor", he or she wouldn't be able to diagnose a great deal and wouldn't understand why things aren't working. She would probably note that we have a quasi-government, a house of elected representatives, and a court of justice. In fact, she might be more inclined to send us to see a psychiatrist!

— The worryingly low turn-out for European elections is definitely real however...

**PL:** There is a democratic deficit, but it has almost nothing to do with the institutions or processes. As Elie Barnavi used to say, *Europe's problem is that it's politically frigid*. There is nothing there to suggest emotional involvement or a sense of belonging that gets peoples' imaginations running.

— So, how would you define the deficit?

**PL:** It is "anthropolitical". It's more of an anthropological problem than an institutional or judicial one. Indeed, the most important question is not about working out the next institutional reform, but rather: how can we get peoples' imaginations running through the

use of narratives? What European mythologies would be capable of juxtaposing national ones without replacing them?

— How can we get to that point?

**PL:** To my knowledge, there is only one country in Europe, in the Balkans, where the national celebration is evocative of a defeat – everywhere else the story is always about a victory. More generally speaking, our national systems are the product of an organised, even invented, memory, such as in France for example, with Saint-Louis, Clovis, or the battle of Poitiers. This frigid space must be filled with an emotional capacity that is narrative in nature, capable of mobilising minds.

— So, there is no unifying European myth?

**PL:** At the moment, Europe is a counter-myth as it's based on the rejection of war. This mythology is not a dream but a nightmare. Its galvanising effect is therefore slim.

— What about the European passport, the European flag, the European anthem?

**PL:** It's putting the cart before the horse: an anthropological error that I take some responsibility for, as I was amongst those who thought they were in the spirit of a "citizens' Europe", as we used to say at the time. It is the myth that creates the hymn, the flag, the passport, not the other way around! We lack the underlying narrative foundation needed to get peoples' imaginations running:

that is where the democratic deficit lies. We must understand why the rather alchemistic reasoning of the founding fathers – that the cornerstone of economic integration will transform into political gold – does not work!

— Following the example of the euro, does economic integration not lead to political integration?

**PL:** That is true and we can plainly see that situations involving leaving the euro create political problems. But look at the Euro note – it's cold and anonymous.

— Does the absence of myths benefit the populists?

**PL:** We have backtracked on the cultural side. In reality, populism has two sources of origin: social security and cultural security. On the left, we are far too concerned with reinventing the welfare state and shifting the boundaries of tradition. As far as cultural insecurity is concerned, the right and the extreme-right have an enormous comparative advantage as they advocate a return to tradition. Yet, returning to the past is an extreme form of conservatism.

— Given the immediate lack of a unifying myth, have there not been some interesting democratic advances such as the *Spitzenkandidaten*?

**PL:** Of course, democratic advances continue to be put in place and are very useful, but this is not an institutional question. The *Spitzenkandidaten* do not need to change the institutions. Another

development that involves the socialists is direct membership of the Party of European Socialists, something that has been refused by the national socialist parties. Now there is a serious institutional hurdle that reveals the dichotomy between the European and national spaces, considering we are the first to make the case for continuity! There's no need to change the institutions to fix that!

— **Is an increase in the Commission's competencies necessary?**

**PL:** The burning questions concerns whether or not we remain attached to a classic parliamentary model, with majority and opposition, or a Swiss - style federal system. Beyond that, I have noted that many of our diplomats - starting with the French and the English - still refuse to accept that the Commission is a government. They continue to see it as the secretariat of the Council which, for them, is the true government.

— **The current European Parliament works on the majority of ideas. Could the classic parliamentary model be officially imposed?**

**PL:** We are far from that point, as it would imply that the Commission is made up of elected individuals or a coalition negotiated with a majority in the European Parliament. However, and this is how I understand the institutions, we already exist within a parliamentary system. The Commission is a quasi-government, the Council is the senate of the Member States, and the Parliament is a house of

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representatives. Moreover, the Parliament can pass a vote of no confidence against the Commission. This has happened once, even if the Commission had retired the night before.

— **Is your understanding reinforced by your experience as Commissioner for Trade?**

**PL:** Without a doubt. As trade is a federal competency, I had to work with the Council and Parliament. I was also involved with the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

— **Would you then welcome the reorganisation of the College, orchestrated by Jean-Claude Juncker, to make the Commission more political?**

**PL:** It is true that the excessive number of commissioners, a product of mediocre diplomatic compromise, limits the Commission's political character. Thus, Juncker's reform, albeit a little heavy-handed, does allow for the agenda and action to be made more political.

— **What do you think of the election of a European president through universal suffrage?**

**PL:** The idea that the election of a president through universal suffrage would compensate for the European democratic deficit is misguided. One only has to look to the state of democracy in France to realise as such. Besides, if it did happen, he or she would always be German!



#### > ABOUT

**Pascal Lamy** is President Emeritus of the Jacques Delors Institute, former Director-General of the World Trade Organisation, a former European Commissioner and Vice-President of FEPS.