


BRUTON: US 'UNFAZED' BY EU'S PROBLEMS

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The US is watching as the EU tries to come to terms with a series of internal problems that have knocked it off its political course in recent months but is not "fazed" by what it sees, according to John Bruton, the EU's ambassador to the US (*and longstanding EPP Vice President & former Prime Minister of Ireland* ed.).

"Americans are not fazed in the same way as we are by this bump in the road", said Mr Bruton on Wednesday (14 September) referring to the bloc's failure to get its constitution ratified, its wrangles over its budget and, lately, Turkey.

"They don't see every problem as an existential crisis", he said adding that Europeans tend to believe the "bicycle theory" whereby if the Union stops going forward it will fall over.

The former Irish prime minister, who was one of those involved in drawing up the EU constitution, was unable to resist offering his own solution to the bloc's turmoil.

Commission president should elected

He said that citizens should be able to elect one major figure in the EU, such as the commission president, which may bring them closer to the union.

"The President of the Commission might be elected by the people and put to the European Parliament for approval. People would feel there is at least one person they can change."

"Although the EU as a project may engage people intellectually, it does not engage them emotionally, as it did in the fifties and sixties, when the reason for the EU was much clearer".

Ten months into what is perhaps one of the most politically sensitive posts in EU diplomacy, Mr Bruton also gave a frank assessment of what he sees as the differences between Europe and America.

Good and evil

He points out that political discourse in the US is "almost biblical" with a focus on good and evil, in contrast to Europeans who are more "relativist".

He is also struck by the feeling that "America still acts as a 19th century state ...(that) doesn't easily accept any trammelling of its authority".

This is quite different to the EU, whose member states have become used to sharing decisions and responsibility and divulging power to the EU level - for them "multilateralism is second nature".

But the ambassador, who is the first political appointee to the post, chastises Europeans for thinking that Americans are ignorant about Europe.

"Americans are not ignorant about Europe and many have a very deep knowledge of Europe. They are interested in what we are doing", he told listeners at the European Policy Centre in Brussels.

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