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Building a Vision for Europe Through the Lenses of a Constructive Central European Perspective

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With European Parliament elections, a new European Commission and Brexit, 2019 promises to be a pivotal year for the European Union (EU). The outcome of these key developments will also shape the EU's response to a number of pressing issues, including:

- ensuring economic growth and financial stability
- harnessing the full potential of technologies while safeguarding labour markets
- balancing migration policies with the need to protect citizens and borders
- determining the EU's future role on the global stage

Against such a complex backdrop of challenges it also appears that the EU's eastern and western flanks are redrawing separation lines, an unhelpful development fueled by the growing popularity of populist and eurosceptic forces. Debating its future, the EU is walking the slippery slope of differentiated integration, where it must carefully balance between the opportunity to make progress and the risk of triggering divisions. There is an urgent need to assess current developments, carefully identify the potentially dangerous consequences for political, economic and social stability, and devise steps towards resolution.

Compared to its not so distant past, today's Central Europe is doing rather well. Prosperity is growing, and quality of life is improving. The region is also more politically and economically integrated with Western European structures. Yet there are still unresolved issues that serve as sources of discontent: disappointment with slower than expected economic convergence; a loss of appetite for liberal democracy; shorter institutional memory; and a less established political culture are just some of the challenges that put Eastern and Western Europe at odds. Populism and Euroscepticism are on the rise in Central Europe. Society and political elites are increasingly concentrating on differences rather than similarities between the region and Western European counterparts.

Key questions

- What are the potential effects of an East-West divide?
- Are we witnessing the emergence of a multispeed European Union?
- How can common European challenges be resolved if such a division exists?
- What are possible common points of intersection around which fundamental principles and guidelines can be developed?
- Can constructive voices from Central and Eastern Europe make a strong contribution to a vision for Europe that bridges existing gaps and reignites a common purpose?

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