

Regaining confidence in the euro: Three pressing issues

By [Jérôme Creel](#)

In a communication on European economic governance before the European Parliament's ECON Committee on Monday, 17 October 2011, three pressing issues were identified in order to save the euro and improve its management.

Saving the euro without further delay is the priority. To do this, it is necessary to provide the EFSF with sufficient funds and to require the ECB to continue intervening in the market for government bonds, so as to resolve the difference between the long-term rates of the peripheral countries and those in the countries in the heart of the euro zone (Germany, France, Netherlands), where these rates are falling and thus benefiting these countries, whereas the rise in the periphery is placing a heavy burden on the public finances of Greece, of course, but also of Portugal and Spain.

Second, the new legislation amending the Stability and Growth Pact and setting up a symmetrical device for monitoring macroeconomic imbalances needs to be implemented as soon as possible. This second priority is urgent, too: it should in the future allow the euro zone to avoid a new crisis, or at least to protect itself with proper instruments and surveillance. In this context, the European Parliament is being asked to "check the checkers" so as to give a real boost to Europeans' trust in their institutions.

Finally, it is necessary to ensure the proper functioning of European governance. Nothing has been lost, intelligent rules do exist: they must be applied after consultation. Inflation targeting on the monetary side and a genuine golden rule of public finances on the budget side both need to emerge.

Communication to the European Parliament ECON Committee, 17 October 2011

Dear Honorable Members,

After almost two years of European turmoil related to the bad management of public finances in a few Eurozone countries, and more than four years after a deep worldwide crisis, time is certainly ripe for reaching European solutions to cure the crisis. Two emergencies are at stake: first, stopping distrust's contagion vis-à-vis Eurozone members; second, stopping misbehaviors' contagion among Eurozone members in the future. By the way, this second emergency certainly necessitates a separation between two periods: the short run and the longer run.

1. Short run emergency 1: improving trust in the Euro

In order to cope with the first emergency, Eurozone countries need a more automatic solidarity mechanism. There have been different options discussed and implemented so far at the Eurozone level, from the EFSF (then future ESM) to Eurobonds, or the intervention of the ECB on secondary markets. They all need to be enforced and implemented as soon as possible without limitations, otherwise discrepancies in long-term yields on public bonds will continue to grow across Eurozone members, at the expense of countries with twin deficits and at the benefit of countries which are closer to twin balance. Without strong automatic interventions, Eurozone countries take the risk of feeding distrust in their ability to support the Euro. The consequence might be distrust in the future of the Euro, distrust in the future of the EU project.

2. Short run emergency 2: enforcing the "6-pack" with improvement in its democratic content

In order to cope with the second emergency, the European Commission, the President H. van Rompuy and the European Parliament have dealt with the EU governance of the near

future through a “6-pack” of legislative amendments which were adopted on 25 September 2011.

A major step has been made in the good direction: macro imbalances are no longer automatically related to deficits as they may also refer to surpluses; and a macro imbalance can be considered “excessive” only to the extent that it “jeopardizes or risks jeopardizing the proper functioning of the EMU”. This is clear understanding that provided Eurozone countries are primarily partners rather than competitors, their trade links shall not be automatically confounded with risky imbalances for they do not impinge on the common currency, the Euro.

The “6-pack” also deals with the better enforcement of the Stability and Growth Pact, introducing earlier sanctions, and a more comprehensive fiscal surveillance framework. This is certainly necessary to make sure that the risk of moral hazard in the Eurozone is reduced to a minimum. However, the overall ‘6-pack’ must pass beforehand criteria for the effectiveness of a fiscal rule.

There have been different ways to assess reform proposals for economic policies. A well-known and convenient one is a set of criteria first developed by George Kopits and Steven Symansky at a time when both were working at the IMF. According to them, a fiscal rule is effective if it is well-defined, transparent, simple, flexible, adequate relative to goal, enforceable, consistent and efficient. In an amendment by the European Parliament related to macro imbalances, one can read that the indicators in the scoreboard must be relevant, practical, simple, measurable and available; moreover, flexibility is advocated in the assessment of macro imbalances. The Kopits-Symansky criteria are thus still relevant, and only their seventh criterion, consistency, seems to have been forgotten from the list. Does it reveal that through the current reform proposals, no one wishes to deal with monetary policy, which consistency with fiscal policies might well be assessed, and the other way round?

I have written elsewhere my own views on Kopits and Symansky's set of criteria ([Creel, 2003](#); [Creel and Saraceno, 2010](#)), but I think I need to insist on the simplicity one. I fear the existence of a so-called "simplicity" criterion when complex problems are arising. For instance, a strong public deficit may be due to 'bad times' (recession, slow GDP growth), interest rates hikes, wrong policies, a non-existing tax system, etc. A simple rule cannot handle the multiplicity of the causes for a deficit. I also fear that such a criterion is simply disrespectful towards the people: well-informed people can certainly approve complex rules if they believe that those who implement them target the common interest.

It leads me to propose that the "simplicity" criterion is changed into a "democratic" criterion. That change would not be substantial as regards Kopits and Symansky's justification of their criterion: simplicity is required, they say, to enhance the appeal of the rule to the legislature and to the public. Changing "simplicity" into "democratic" would thus be consistent with their view. It would add two advantages. First, there would be no need to target simple or simplistic rules, if more complex ones are required. Second, to enhance their appeal to the public, these rules should be endorsed and monitored by a Parliament: as their members are the representatives of the public, the latter would be fully informed of the nature and properties of the rule.

What would be the main consequences of assessing reform proposals through the lens of democratic content in the current context? First, the now-complex setting of fiscal rules in the EU, under the amendments of 25 September 2011, is well-defined but it is no longer simple. That should not lead us to assume that these rules will not be efficient. Second, if all European authorities, including the European Parliament, approved a stricter surveillance mechanism for fiscal policies, macro imbalances, and employment guidelines, control over the misbehaving countries should be shared with

all these authorities, hence also including the European Parliament. The implication of the latter, with that of the European Council, would enhance the appropriation of rules by the public, and the trust of the public in their institutions. Third, another consequence would be that automaticity in sanctions should not be an option for automaticity is contradictory with the essence of a democracy: contradictory debates.

Are the current reform proposals respecting the “democratic” criterion? The implication of the EP in these reforms already calls for a positive answer. Nevertheless, the implication of the EP in “checking the checkers” is necessary to achieve a definite positive answer. This implication might be very productive in reassessing the effectiveness of the policies which are undertaken in a country where suspicion of misbehavior is developing. The implication of the Economic Dialogue and the European Semester should also be used to improve trust in the EU institutions and the Eurozone governments, with due respect to the subsidiarity principle. Sharing information, analyses, data should be viewed by all partners as a way to achieve cooperation, keeping in mind that John Nash showed through his solutions that cooperative equilibria always lead to a win-win situation.

“Checking the checkers”, as I mentioned above, involves an informed assessment of the effectiveness of fiscal policies. Such an assessment is not dealt with in the current Stability and Growth Pact. During the procedure of fiscal surveillance, and before sanctioning a country, it is of the highest priority to gauge the effectiveness of a fiscal policy which has led to higher deficits and debts.

Discussions about fiscal policies are usually very pessimistic nowadays, as far as their effectiveness is concerned, but those endorsing these discussions take the risk that the people have finally no trust in their governments, for they are said to follow the wrong policies, and in the European

institutions that are not able to stop these policies.

It may be useful to recall (once again?) that a consensus exists in the economic literature about the sign of the fiscal multiplier: it is [positive](#). And because of that, the Chinese, US, German, French, etc. governments decided to increase their deficits through discretionary policies during the worldwide crisis: these governments were conscious that their policies were helpful. Why shouldn't they during other 'bad times'? Why should we all think that a contagion of fiscal restrictions in the EU will help us thrust again? Good policymaking requires that policies are contingent to the economic situation (GDP growth, inflation rate, level of unemployment, etc.).

In my view, at this stage, there are two important prerequisites to a rapid improvement in the EU governance, and I do not think they require a new Treaty. We all know that at the ECB and beyond, some argue that political pressures led this institution to buy public bonds, in contrast, they add, with the EU Treaty. Its independence would have been at stake. For this reason, the first prerequisite is in recalling the independence and mission of the ECB. The ECB is a young institution and it needs confidence in itself, as a teenager does. Once definitely adult, after full confidence is reached, the ECB will not fear coordination or cooperation with governments and the EP that fully respect its independence but may wish to improve the consistency of their policies with its.

The second prerequisite is in recalling the objectives of the EU, growth and stability, and in admitting that there is not a single way to achieve these objectives, for countries are still so different within the EU, even within the Eurozone. The 'one size fits all' is no longer an option, hence the necessity to complement fiscal rules with an assessment of macro imbalances and with regular, transparent, and democratically-controlled assessments of the relevance of the underlying analyses by governments on the one hand, and

controllers on the other. There is a strong role for the EP in acknowledging and managing this no 'one size fits all' way of dealing with fiscal rules.

3. Longer run emergency 2: more intelligent rules?

In the longer run, if improvements by the ECB in cooperating with governments have not materialized, a binding commitment to follow a cooperative behavior could be included in the statutes of the ECB. A change in its statutes might also be considered, with a view to adopting, for instance, a [dual mandate](#) similar to that of the Fed. That way, it would be clear that "if 5% inflation would have (Central bankers') hair on fire, so should 9% unemployment" (Ch. Evans, 2011). Another possibility would be to urge the ECB to implement full inflation targeting. That would require the ECB to make public its forecasts and minutes of decisions, thus enhancing information and potentially influencing the private sector.

Lastly, the most important debate on fiscal policymaking is in wondering what governments are doing with tax and spending, and how they finance them. The European Semester and the monitoring of indicators of macro imbalances certainly go in the good direction, but rather than a global view on the evolution of deficits and debts, Eurozone countries should think about circumscribing the good and bad parts of taxes and spending and make sure they all target the good policy, at their benefit and at the benefit of others. Of course, this is not an easy task, but it is a task that would make the EU fiscal rules ever more "intelligent".

Having common objectives within Europe 2020, it could be thought of having common tools to reach them: a higher EU budget? Or an authentic but modified [golden rule of public finance](#) where some expenditures proved to be productive, with the agreement of all EU member states, would be left out of the scope of binding rules? That is not the hot topic of the day, but had it been before the SGP reform of 2005 that the

stability of the Eurozone might not have been at stake the way it has been since the worldwide crisis.

I thank you for your attention.

Le Sommet du G20 de Cannes : chronique d'une déception annoncée ?

par [Jérôme Creel](#) et [Francesco Saraceno](#)

(une première version de ce point de vue est parue sur le site [lemonde.fr](#), [ici](#))

Trop longue, trop technique, la [déclaration finale](#) d'action collective du Sommet du G20 à Cannes montre qu'aucune vision claire et partagée des turbulences économiques et financières qui secouent l'économie mondiale ne s'est dégagée lors du Sommet. Et Sénèque de nous rappeler que la déception aurait été moins pénible si l'on ne s'était pas d'avance promis le succès.

Après les annonces officielles, la déception était palpable à l'issue d'un sommet du G20 au cours duquel aucune avancée significative n'a été réalisée pour les dossiers les plus importants du moment, la relance de la croissance notamment. Les questions agricoles et financières, cruciales elles aussi, n'ont donné lieu qu'à des déclarations d'intention, avec le rappel pour ces dernières des engagements pris... en 2008 ! Cette déception doit être cependant relativisée car le G20 est principalement une instance de discussion plutôt que de décision. Que reste-t-il en effet des engagements pris par le

G20 de Londres d'avril 2009 en pleine récession mondiale ? Les politiques budgétaires expansionnistes ? Oubliées, sous l'effet de l'endettement public qu'elles ont produit, endettement qui, soit dit en passant, était parfaitement prévisible. La régulation financière renforcée ? Ressassée, mais point encore mise en œuvre, malgré la détermination affichée à Paris les 14 et 15 octobre 2011. La volonté d'échapper au protectionnisme ? A peine mentionnée, elle n'aura d'ailleurs pas empêché la constitution de 36 cas de [différends commerciaux](#) portés auprès de l'OMC, dont 14 impliquant la Chine, l'UE et/ou les Etats-Unis. Il ne reste plus que les politiques monétaires, « expansionnistes aussi longtemps que nécessaire » dans les déclarations préalables au Sommet. Le sort du système monétaire international ne dépend-il que du bon vouloir des banquiers centraux, indépendants de surcroît ?

La réunion a en outre été perturbée par la crise qui secoue la zone euro, qui a quasiment effacé de l'agenda des dossiers importants comme cette réapparition du protectionnisme, reléguée aux paragraphes 65 à 68 d'un document en comportant 95. A Cannes les pays émergents et les Etats-Unis ont été spectateurs d'un drame qui se déroulait entre Paris, Berlin, Rome et Athènes.

Cette crise qui secoue la zone euro découle de l'hétérogénéité des pays qui la constituent, comme la crise financière déclenchée en 2007 fut causée, outre l'absence de réglementation financière, par l'hétérogénéité croissante entre pays mercantiles et pays supposés être les eldorados de l'investissement, d'un côté la Chine et l'Allemagne, de l'autre, les Etats-Unis et l'Irlande. L'hétérogénéité européenne, l'une des [quatre déficiences de la zone euro](#), a conduit les pays disposant d'un excédent de leur balance des comptes courants à financer les pays en situation de déficit. Seule et avec la priorité donnée à la lutte contre l'inflation que le Traité de l'UE lui a imposée, la BCE est impuissante à

renforcer la convergence au sein de la zone euro. Cependant, à court terme elle peut mettre fin à la crise de l'euro en acceptant d'apporter une garantie intégrale sur les dettes publiques de la zone euro (voir [\[1\]](#), [\[2\]](#) ou [\[3\]](#)), et en augmentant sensiblement ses [acquisitions de titres de dette publique européenne](#). Ceci préserverait la stabilité financière européenne et engendrerait peut-être des anticipations inflationnistes, contribuant ainsi à sortir l'économie européenne de la [trappe à liquidité](#) dans laquelle elle se trouve depuis le début de la crise financière. Notons que malgré son activisme, la Réserve fédérale américaine n'a pas jusque-là réussi à engendrer de telles anticipations et reste engluée dans une même trappe à liquidités.

A plus longue échéance, il convient de revoir la gouvernance économique européenne. L'usage actif des politiques économiques aux Etats-Unis et en Chine contraste avec la prudence affichée par la BCE et avec les réticences européennes à mener des politiques budgétaires expansionnistes, et plus généralement avec le choix de bâtir la gouvernance économique européenne sur le refus des politiques discrétionnaires. Ainsi serait-il souhaitable que, tout en préservant son indépendance, la BCE puisse poursuivre un [double mandat](#) d'inflation et de croissance, et que les [règles qui disciplinent](#) la politique budgétaire soient plus « intelligentes » et flexibles.

Donner aux autorités de politique économique la possibilité de mener des politiques discrétionnaires ne doit pas faire oublier le risque de manque de concertation, qui peut amener le Congrès américain à menacer unilatéralement de taxes compensatoires les marchandises importées de pays dont la monnaie serait sous-évaluée. Une telle volonté fait resurgir le spectre du protectionnisme, et les pays du G20 devraient envisager un mécanisme pour coordonner les politiques, et éviter ainsi des guerres commerciales plus ou moins explicitement déclarées.

En outre, une guerre des monnaies ne semble pas une façon efficace de protéger nos économies : la sous- ou surévaluation d'une monnaie est un concept complexe à appliquer, et l'incidence de la valeur d'une devise sur les exportations et importations est rendue très incertaine par la fragmentation internationale de la production de marchandises et de services. A une politique défensive, il vaut donc sans aucun doute mieux substituer une [politique industrielle active](#), permettant de tirer profit de nouvelles niches technologiques créatrices d'activités et d'emplois.

Au final, pour que les mots aient un sens concret – pour « engendrer la confiance et la croissance » dans les économies avancées et « soutenir la croissance en contenant les pressions inflationnistes » dans les économies émergentes ([Communiqué du G20](#), Paris, 14-15 octobre 2011) -, il faut remettre en cause la « contagion des [contractions budgétaires](#) » qui secoue aujourd'hui la zone euro et, plutôt qu'une phase supplémentaire de rigueur, mettre à l'ordre du jour des plans de relance dans les économies avancées pendant que les taux d'intérêt sont encore bas. Ces plans doivent être ciblés pour engendrer de la croissance et ne pas mettre en péril la solvabilité des finances publiques : il faut donc favoriser les investissements publics. Ils doivent être coordonnés entre eux pour en maximiser l'impact global, mais aussi avec l'action des banques centrales, afin que celles-ci les accompagnent par le maintien de taux d'intérêt bas. Le Sommet de novembre 2011 arrivait à point nommé pour qu'une telle concertation émerge. Il n'en fut malheureusement rien.

The G20 Summit in Cannes: Chronicle of a Disappointment Foretold?

By [Jérôme Creel](#) and [Francesco Saraceno](#)

Too long and too technical, the [final declaration](#) of collective action of the G20 Summit in Cannes shows that no clear and shared vision of the economic and financial turmoil that is rocking the global economy has emerged at the Summit. And as Seneca reminds us, the disappointment would have been less painful if success had not been promised in advance.

According to the official announcements, the disappointment was palpable at the end of a G20 summit in which no significant progress was achieved – on the most important issues of the moment, the revival of growth in particular. The crucial issues of agriculture and finance gave rise simply to declarations of intent, with a reminder of the commitments made on these ... in 2008! The disappointment must be kept in perspective, however, as the G20 is primarily a forum for discussion rather than for decisions. Indeed, what remains of the commitments made in April 2009 by the G20 in London, mired in global recession? The expansionary fiscal policies? Forgotten, as a result of the public debt that they have produced – debt, by the way, that was perfectly predictable. Strengthened financial regulation? Repeatedly trotted out, but still not implemented, despite the determination displayed in Paris on 14 and 15 October 2011. The desire to avoid protectionism? Barely mentioned, nor did this succeed in preventing the outbreak of 36 [trade disputes](#) brought before the WTO, including 14 involving China, the EU and / or the United States. All that remains is a monetary policy that is “expansionary as long as necessary”, in the words of the pre-Summit statements. So does the fate of the international

monetary system depend simply on the good will of the central bankers, independent as they are?

The meeting was also troubled by the crisis hitting the euro zone, which virtually forced off the agenda such important issues as the resurgence of protectionism, which was relegated to paragraphs 65 to 68 of a 95-paragraph document. At Cannes, the emerging economies and the US were spectators of a drama unfolding between Paris, Berlin, Rome and Athens.

The crisis hitting the euro zone is a result of the heterogeneity of its constituent countries, much as the financial crisis triggered in 2007 was a result not just of a lack of financial regulation but also of the increasing heterogeneity between mercantile countries and countries presumed to be the El Dorados of investment, on the one hand China and Germany, and on the other, the United States and Ireland. This European heterogeneity, one of four deficiencies of the euro zone, has led countries with a surplus in their current accounts to finance countries running a deficit. Alone, and with its priority on the fight against inflation imposed by the Treaty of the EU, the ECB is unable to promote convergence within the euro zone. However, in the short term it can end the crisis in the euro by agreeing to provide full coverage of public debts in the euro zone (see [\[1\]](#), [\[2\]](#) or [\[3\]](#)), and by significantly increasing its [purchases of government debt in Europe](#). This would maintain European financial stability and perhaps generate inflationary expectations, thereby helping to lift Europe's economy out of the [liquidity trap](#) in which it has been mired since the beginning of the financial crisis. Note that despite its activism, the US Federal Reserve has not so far managed to create such expectations and remains caught in the same kind of liquidity trap.

In the longer term, it is necessary to review European economic governance. The active use of economic policy in the United States and China contrasts with the caution displayed

by the ECB and with the European reluctance to pursue expansionary fiscal policies, and more generally with the decision to build European economic governance on a refusal of discretionary policies. It would be desirable for the ECB, while preserving its independence, to be able to pursue a [dual mandate](#) on inflation and growth, and for the [rules that discipline](#) fiscal policy to be “smarter” and more flexible.

Giving the economic policy authorities an opportunity to implement discretionary policies should not mean forgetting about the risks posed by the absence of a coordinated approach, which may lead the US Congress to threaten unilateral compensatory taxes on goods imported from countries whose currency is undervalued. This move is evoking the specter of protectionism, and the G20 countries should consider a mechanism to coordinate policy so as to avoid the trade wars that are already being more or less explicitly declared.

Furthermore, a currency war does not seem to be an effective way to protect our economies: the under-or overvaluation of a currency is a complex concept to apply, and the impact of a currency's value on exports and imports is made very uncertain by the international fragmentation that characterizes the production of goods and services. Rather than employing a defensive policy, it is definitely better to substitute an [active industrial policy](#) to take advantage of new technological niches that create business and jobs.

Finally, for words to have real meaning – to “build confidence and support growth” in the advanced economies and “support growth” while “containing inflationary pressures” in the emerging economies ([G20 Communiqué](#), Paris, 14-15 October 2011) – we must challenge the “contagion of [fiscal contraction](#)” that is now shaking the euro area and, rather than an additional phase of rigor, put recovery plans on the agenda in the advanced economies while interest rates are still low. These plans must be targeted in order to generate growth and not

jeopardize the solvency of public finances: it is thus necessary to encourage public investment. To maximize their overall impact, these plans need to be coordinated, including with the actions of the central banks, so that the latter can support them by maintaining low interest rates. The Summit in November 2011 was very timely for this kind of coordinated approach to emerge. Unfortunately, it didn't.

Politique monétaire : l'histoire sans fin

par [Christophe Blot](#) et Christine Riffart

Les banques centrales disposent-elles encore de marges de manœuvre pour contrer les pressions déflationnistes aux Etats-Unis et éviter à la zone euro de sombrer dans une nouvelle crise financière comparable à celle de 2008 ?

Malgré la baisse des taux directeurs des banques centrales à des niveaux planchers compris entre 0 et 0,5 % (1 % pour la BCE avant les deux hausses de 0,25 % en avril et juillet dernier), les politiques monétaires sont restées sans effet sur les conditions de financement des agents privés. Pourtant, depuis le début de l'été, les mauvaises nouvelles s'enchaînent de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique et nourrissent un pessimisme accru. La crise de confiance dans la zone euro accroît le risque de blocage et l'absence de reprise du crédit aux Etats-Unis, du fait notamment de taux privés qui peinent à baisser, montre que la trappe à liquidité qui s'est mise en place à la suite de la crise financière de 2008 n'est toujours pas refermée. Cette situation alimente la crise de liquidité

que l'on peut observer sur les marchés interbancaires à travers les *spreads* (graphique 1) et les enquêtes auprès des banques. Même si elles n'ont pas encore atteint les sommets observés lors de la faillite de Lehman Brothers aux Etats-Unis, de telles tensions illustrent les craintes sur la fragilité des banques européennes du fait de leur exposition aux dettes des Etats membres de la zone euro et montrent combien la situation en matière de dette souveraine pèse sur la stabilité du système bancaire européen.



La trappe à liquidité renvoie à une situation où le taux d'intérêt atteint un niveau plancher et où la politique monétaire ne parvient plus à stimuler l'économie par le recours aux instruments conventionnels. L'image de la trappe correspond à l'idée que toute monnaie supplémentaire émise par la banque centrale est immédiatement absorbée – comme si elle tombait dans une trappe – par une demande de monnaie qui devient infiniment élastique au taux d'intérêt. Monnaie et titres deviennent parfaitement substituables. Pour contrer cet effet, les banques centrales peuvent recourir aux mesures dites non conventionnelles. Par des programmes d'achats de créances publiques ou privées, elles tentent d'avoir une prise directe sur la structure par terme des taux d'intérêt. Elles fournissent en quantité abondante de liquidités au système bancaire afin d'encourager le crédit. Elles peuvent également chercher à influencer les anticipations d'inflation et de taux d'intérêt futurs. Une hausse de l'inflation anticipée permet de réduire le taux d'intérêt réel *ex-ante*. De même,

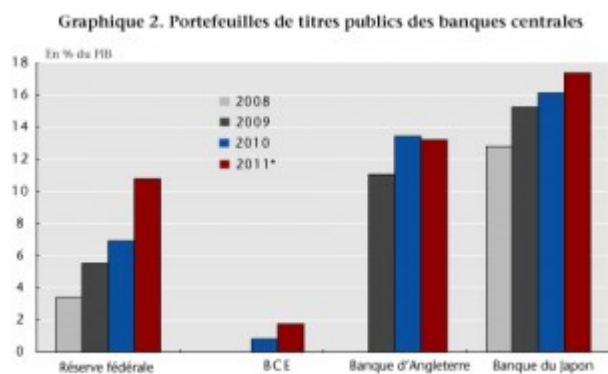
l'engagement sur une politique de taux faibles à un horizon long peut redonner confiance aux agents privés et les inciter à consommer et investir.

Consciente des risques encourues, la BCE a décidé, à l'issue du [Conseil des Gouverneurs](#) qui s'est tenu le 6 octobre 2011, de reconduire des opérations exceptionnelles de refinancement à long terme et de lancer un second programme d'achats d'obligations sécurisées. Ces annonces rejoignent celle de la Banque d'Angleterre le même jour (voir le [compte rendu](#) de la réunion du 6 octobre 2011) prévoyant une nouvelle vague d'achats d'obligations publiques pour un montant de 75 milliards de livres sterling. De son côté, la Banque du Japon continue également de relever régulièrement son plafond d'achats de titres qui atteint désormais 15 000 milliards de yens (soit 3,1 % du PIB).

Pour autant, ces mesures sont loin des actions menées par la Réserve fédérale pour faire pression sur les marchés financiers. Première à avoir rassuré les marchés sur le maintien du taux des Fonds fédéraux entre 0 et 0,25 % aussi longtemps que nécessaire, elle a complété son action sur les anticipations de taux courts futurs en annonçant le 9 août qu'elle maintiendrait à ce niveau au moins jusqu'à la mi 2013. Mais surtout, un nouveau programme d'achat de titres a été lancé le 21 septembre 2011 (dit QE3) (voir le [compte rendu](#)). Le plan prévoit l'achat, d'ici juin 2012, de 400 milliards de dollars de titres du Trésor ayant une durée de vie restante entre 6 et 30 ans contre des titres ayant une durée de vie restante inférieure à 3 ans.

Cette action, destinée à peser sur les taux des marchés financiers, s'inscrit dans une politique initiée dès le début de l'année 2009, et visant d'abord les taux hypothécaires (via les MBS), puis l'ensemble de la chaîne de taux privés. En achetant des titres publics de différentes maturités sur le marché secondaire, la Réserve fédérale espère peser suffisamment sur les volumes pour réduire les rendements

offerts et conduire les investisseurs à reporter leurs achats vers des titres plus longs, et plus risqués. Pour être efficaces, ces achats doivent être de grande ampleur. C'est pourquoi la Fed n'a pas hésité à accroître son bilan et acheter depuis 2008, l'équivalent de 7,4 % du PIB en titres publics. La Banque du Japon et la Banque d'Angleterre, qui détenaient un portefeuille de titres publics déjà élevé en 2008, ont acquis, malgré tout, pendant la crise l'équivalent de 4,6 % et 2,2 % du PIB de titres publics supplémentaires. La BCE ne s'est pas mise dans cette position. En intervenant sur les marchés pour acheter des titres grecs ou italiens, la BCE a avant tout cherché à préserver la stabilité financière eu égard à la forte exposition du système bancaire européen sur les titres de dette souveraine et à assurer, dans l'attente d'une solution pérenne, la viabilité de la zone euro. Cette position prudente, voire trop prudente, lui donne donc l'opportunité d'amplifier, à l'image des autres banques centrales, sa politique d'achat de titres afin de peser plus largement sur les taux d'intérêt publics à long terme de l'ensemble de la zone euro (graphique 2).



* 2011 sur la base des mois de janvier à septembre.
Sources : Banques centrales nationales, Comptes nationaux, Eurostat.

Si tel était le cas, cette stratégie permettrait également une meilleure coordination des politiques économiques. L'évolution des taux d'intérêt à long terme conditionne l'efficacité de la politique budgétaire, en réduisant d'une part les effets d'éviction financière et en assurant la soutenabilité des trajectoires de dette publique qui dépend crucialement de l'écart entre le taux de croissance du PIB et le taux

d'intérêt. De fait, ces mesures d'assouplissement quantitatives aux Etats-Unis et au Japon accompagnent la mise en œuvre de nouveaux plans de relance budgétaire. Si le gouvernement britannique a fait le choix d'une forte restriction budgétaire, il bénéficie malgré tout des actions entreprises par la Banque d'Angleterre pour atténuer l'impact récessif des plans d'austérité. Comparativement à ses homologues, la zone euro dispose donc de marges de manœuvre à la fois en termes de baisses des taux d'intérêt (après les deux hausses à contre-pied d'avril et juillet derniers) mais également afin d'améliorer la coordination entre politiques monétaire et budgétaire.

Ce texte fait référence à une [étude sur la politique monétaire jointe à l'analyse de la conjoncture et la prévision à l'horizon 2011-2012](#) que le département analyse et prévision a présentées le vendredi 14 octobre 2011. Les analyses sont disponibles sur le site internet de l'OFCE.

Retrouver la confiance dans l'euro : trois urgences

par [Jérôme Creel](#)

Dans une communication devant la Commission ECON du Parlement européen, lundi 17 octobre 2011, à propos de la gouvernance économique européenne, trois urgences sont recensées pour sauver l'euro et améliorer sa gestion.

Sauver l'euro sans délai supplémentaire est la priorité : pour cela, il faut doter suffisamment le FESF et requérir de la BCE qu'elle poursuive ses interventions sur les marchés d'obligations publiques, afin que se résorbe l'écart entre les

taux longs des pays périphériques et ceux des pays du coeur de la zone euro (Allemagne, France, Pays-Bas), où les seconds baissent, au bénéfice donc de l'Allemagne, de la France et des Pays-Bas, tandis que les premiers augmentent et font peser un lourd fardeau sur les finances publiques de la Grèce, certes, mais aussi du Portugal et de l'Espagne.

Deuxièmement, il faut appliquer au plus vite les nouvelles dispositions législatives modifiant le Pacte de Stabilité et de Croissance et créant un dispositif symétrique de surveillance des déséquilibres macroéconomiques. Cette seconde priorité est urgente, elle aussi : elle doit permettre à la zone euro d'échapper à l'avenir à une nouvelle crise, du moins de s'en prémunir par des instruments et une surveillance adéquats. Dans ce cadre, le Parlement européen est invité à "contrôler les contrôleurs" afin que la confiance des Européens dans leurs institutions s'améliore sensiblement.

Enfin, il faut s'assurer du bon fonctionnement de la gouvernance européenne. Rien n'est perdu, des règles intelligentes existent : elles doivent être appliquées après concertation. Le ciblage d'inflation pour le versant monétaire et l'authentique règle d'or des finances publiques pour le versant budgétaire doivent émerger.

Communication devant la Commission ECON, Parlement européen,
17 octobre 2011

Without trust, no thrust: some reflections on the new EU agenda for policy reforms (first version [here](#))

Dear Madame Chair,

Dear Honorable Members,

After almost two years of European turmoil related to the bad management of public finances in a few Eurozone countries, and more than four years after a deep worldwide crisis, time is certainly ripe for reaching European solutions to cure the

crisis. Two emergencies are at stake: first, stopping distrust's contagion vis-à-vis Eurozone members; second, stopping misbehaviors' contagion among Eurozone members in the future. By the way, this second emergency certainly necessitates a separation between two periods: the short run and the longer run.

1. Short run emergency 1: improving trust in the Euro

In order to cope with the first emergency, Eurozone countries need a more automatic solidarity mechanism. There have been different options discussed and implemented so far at the Eurozone level, from the EFSF (then future ESM) to Eurobonds, or the intervention of the ECB on secondary markets. They all need to be enforced and implemented as soon as possible without limitations, otherwise discrepancies in long-term yields on public bonds will continue to grow across Eurozone members, at the expense of countries with twin deficits and at the benefit of countries which are closer to twin balance. Without strong automatic interventions, Eurozone countries take the risk of feeding distrust in their ability to support the Euro. The consequence might be distrust in the future of the Euro, distrust in the future of the EU project.

2. Short run emergency 2: enforcing the "6-pack" with improvement in its democratic content

In order to cope with the second emergency, the European Commission, the President H. van Rompuy and the European Parliament have dealt with the EU governance of the near future through a "6-pack" of legislative amendments which were adopted on 25 September 2011.

A major step has been made in the good direction: macro imbalances are no longer automatically related to deficits as they may also refer to surpluses; and a macro imbalance can be considered "excessive" only to the extent that it "jeopardizes or risks jeopardizing the proper functioning of the EMU". This

is clear understanding that provided Eurozone countries are primarily partners rather than competitors, their trade links shall not be automatically confounded with risky imbalances for they do not impinge on the common currency, the Euro.

The “6-pack” also deals with the better enforcement of the Stability and Growth Pact, introducing earlier sanctions, and a more comprehensive fiscal surveillance framework. This is certainly necessary to make sure that the risk of moral hazard in the Eurozone is reduced to a minimum. However, the overall ‘6-pack’ must pass beforehand criteria for the effectiveness of a fiscal rule.

There have been different ways to assess reform proposals for economic policies. A well-known and convenient one is a set of criteria first developed by George Kopits and Steven Symansky at a time when both were working at the IMF. According to them, a fiscal rule is effective if it is well-defined, transparent, simple, flexible, adequate relative to goal, enforceable, consistent and efficient. In an amendment by the European Parliament related to macro imbalances, one can read that the indicators in the scoreboard must be relevant, practical, simple, measurable and available; moreover, flexibility is advocated in the assessment of macro imbalances. The Kopits-Symansky criteria are thus still relevant, and only their seventh criterion, consistency, seems to have been forgotten from the list. Does it reveal that through the current reform proposals, no one wishes to deal with monetary policy, which consistency with fiscal policies might well be assessed, and the other way round?

I have written elsewhere my own views on Kopits and Symansky’s set of criteria ([Creel, 2003](#); [Creel and Saraceno, 2010](#)), but I think I need to insist on the simplicity one. I fear the existence of a so-called “simplicity” criterion when complex problems are arising. For instance, a strong public deficit may be due to ‘bad times’ (recession, slow GDP growth), interest rates hikes, wrong policies, a non-existing tax

system, etc. A simple rule cannot handle the multiplicity of the causes for a deficit. I also fear that such a criterion is simply disrespectful towards the people: well-informed people can certainly approve complex rules if they believe that those who implement them target the common interest.

It leads me to propose that the “simplicity” criterion is changed into a “democratic” criterion. That change would not be substantial as regards Kopits and Symansky’s justification of their criterion: simplicity is required, they say, to enhance the appeal of the rule to the legislature and to the public. Changing “simplicity” into “democratic” would thus be consistent with their view. It would add two advantages. First, there would be no need to target simple or simplistic rules, if more complex ones are required. Second, to enhance their appeal to the public, these rules should be endorsed and monitored by a Parliament: as their members are the representatives of the public, the latter would be fully informed of the nature and properties of the rule.

What would be the main consequences of assessing reform proposals through the lens of democratic content in the current context? First, the now-complex setting of fiscal rules in the EU, under the amendments of 25 September 2011, is well-defined but it is no longer simple. That should not lead us to assume that these rules will not be efficient. Second, if all European authorities, including the European Parliament, approved a stricter surveillance mechanism for fiscal policies, macro imbalances, and employment guidelines, control over the misbehaving countries should be shared with all these authorities, hence also including the European Parliament. The implication of the latter, with that of the European Council, would enhance the appropriation of rules by the public, and the trust of the public in their institutions. Third, another consequence would be that automaticity in sanctions should not be an option for automaticity is contradictory with the essence of a democracy: contradictory

debates.

Are the current reform proposals respecting the “democratic” criterion? The implication of the EP in these reforms already calls for a positive answer. Nevertheless, the implication of the EP in “checking the checkers” is necessary to achieve a definite positive answer. This implication might be very productive in reassessing the effectiveness of the policies which are undertaken in a country where suspicion of misbehavior is developing. The implication of the Economic Dialogue and the European Semester should also be used to improve trust in the EU institutions and the Eurozone governments, with due respect to the subsidiarity principle. Sharing information, analyses, data should be viewed by all partners as a way to achieve cooperation, keeping in mind that John Nash showed through his solutions that cooperative equilibria always lead to a win-win situation.

“Checking the checkers”, as I mentioned above, involves an informed assessment of the effectiveness of fiscal policies. Such an assessment is not dealt with in the current Stability and Growth Pact. During the procedure of fiscal surveillance, and before sanctioning a country, it is of the highest priority to gauge the effectiveness of a fiscal policy which has led to higher deficits and debts.

Discussions about fiscal policies are usually very pessimistic nowadays, as far as their effectiveness is concerned, but those endorsing these discussions take the risk that the people have finally no trust in their governments, for they are said to follow the wrong policies, and in the European institutions that are not able to stop these policies.

It may be useful to recall (once again?) that a consensus exists in the economic literature about the sign of the fiscal multiplier: it is [positive](#). And because of that, the Chinese, US, German, French, etc. governments decided to increase their deficits through discretionary policies during the worldwide

crisis: these governments were conscious that their policies were helpful. Why shouldn't they during other 'bad times'? Why should we all think that a contagion of fiscal restrictions in the EU will help us thrust again? Good policymaking requires that policies are contingent to the economic situation (GDP growth, inflation rate, level of unemployment, etc.).

In my view, at this stage, there are two important prerequisites to a rapid improvement in the EU governance, and I do not think they require a new Treaty. We all know that at the ECB and beyond, some argue that political pressures led this institution to buy public bonds, in contrast, they add, with the EU Treaty. Its independence would have been at stake. For this reason, the first prerequisite is in recalling the independence and mission of the ECB. The ECB is a young institution and it needs confidence in itself, as a teenager does. Once definitely adult, after full confidence is reached, the ECB will not fear coordination or cooperation with governments and the EP that fully respect its independence but may wish to improve the consistency of their policies with its.

The second prerequisite is in recalling the objectives of the EU, growth and stability, and in admitting that there is not a single way to achieve these objectives, for countries are still so different within the EU, even within the Eurozone. The 'one size fits all' is no longer an option, hence the necessity to complement fiscal rules with an assessment of macro imbalances and with regular, transparent, and democratically-controlled assessments of the relevance of the underlying analyses by governments on the one hand, and controllers on the other. There is a strong role for the EP in acknowledging and managing this no 'one size fits all' way of dealing with fiscal rules.

3. Longer run emergency 2: more intelligent rules?

In the longer run, if improvements by the ECB in cooperating

with governments have not materialized, a binding commitment to follow a cooperative behavior could be included in the statutes of the ECB. A change in its statutes might also be considered, with a view to adopting, for instance, a [dual mandate](#) similar to that of the Fed. That way, it would be clear that “if 5% inflation would have (Central bankers’) hair on fire, so should 9% unemployment” (Ch. Evans, 2011). Another possibility would be to urge the ECB to implement full inflation targeting. That would require the ECB to make public its forecasts and minutes of decisions, thus enhancing information and potentially influencing the private sector.

Lastly, the most important debate on fiscal policymaking is in wondering what governments are doing with tax and spending, and how they finance them. The European Semester and the monitoring of indicators of macro imbalances certainly go in the good direction, but rather than a global view on the evolution of deficits and debts, Eurozone countries should think about circumscribing the good and bad parts of taxes and spending and make sure they all target the good policy, at their benefit and at the benefit of others. Of course, this is not an easy task, but it is a task that would make the EU fiscal rules ever more “intelligent”.

Having common objectives within Europe 2020, it could be thought of having common tools to reach them: a higher EU budget? Or an authentic but modified [golden rule of public finance](#) where some expenditures proved to be productive, with the agreement of all EU member states, would be left out of the scope of binding rules? That is not the hot topic of the day, but had it been before the SGP reform of 2005 that the stability of the Eurozone might not have been at stake the way it has been since the worldwide crisis.

I thank you for your attention.