

How to Make a Bankrupt Department Store into a Winner

Maurizio Borletti

Borletti Group

When I was invited to participate in this conference, I was a little bit concerned. This is because economy trends, systems and competitiveness measured in merchandised market share and so on are very far and remote from the shopkeeper, which I consider myself to be. However, I was intrigued by the theme: «Competitiveness, a Matter of Horizon». Any retailer believes he knows what competitiveness means: whether the customer is going to buy in my shop or the one next door. It seems like a simple question, but it is a relevant one, and I think it is so for everybody, for a small store, for Apple or for a whole country.

By the way, retail is often considered as a sheltered sector. In fact, when we drill down, we see that this is not completely true. Retail is exposed to international competition and this is happening more and more. The impact comes from greater mobility: people move around much more. However, this also comes from new technology; for example, Internet sales are more and more trans-national in nature, so national retailers are exposed. The competitiveness of a country itself also has an impact on our performance. Competitiveness in a country brings growth; growth is related to available income, and this in turn is related to consumption, which affects our customers and business.

Horizon, for a retailer, is a much harder question to answer. In a shop, long term is weekly sales and short term is what is happening today.

So to answer the question of horizon, I decided to go back to 2006, when we acquired the French department store Printemps. Sales had been slowly

and steadily declining for a number of years. It was clearly losing the battle for customers to the shop next door, and actually, I literally mean next door; people who know Paris know whom I am talking about. The truth was, the company was not competitive.

Our challenge was to invert this trend, and make Printemps a winner. During six years of negative market trends, we managed to increase sales by about 30% and to double gross profits. How did we do that? In 2006, we were confronted with this choice. Should we make a short-term choice and go for price and cost? Or should we go for a long-term one, investing in repositioning the business? We ruled out the first one, because this was what department stores had been doing over and over again. This had brought them into a downward spiral, which killed most of them. To give you an idea, there were more than 140 department stores in Paris in the beginning of the XXth century there are 4 at present.

Now, we also needed to assess our strengths and weaknesses: some of the weaknesses were internal and as such could be corrected, others were external so harder to master. This is where considering retail as a sheltered sector is simplistic. Compared to our competitors in London for example, in Paris, we have less flexibility, have higher labor costs and social charges, and we have one less trading day a week: we cannot trade on Sundays. These are significant elements in terms of competitiveness for us, we feel them directly and can do little against them. Our exposure as Printemps, a luxury department store, is certainly stronger than the average. Another weakness we had identified is the level of service we were providing to customers. Now here, again, it was not just an internal problem: France is a country recognized for its luxury products, but unfortunately not as recognized for its luxury service.

In terms of our strengths we had various and amongst them the location of our stores. As you know, in retail, it is certainly one of the key factors. However, it is not enough to have a flagship store in Boulevard Hausmann, which is one of the most emblematic stores in the world. The right positioning of the products, good service and the appearance of the store are key factors. I can tell you that in 2006, our flagship was far from being attractive even if its location was excellent.

In the end, we managed to convince investors and banks of our ambitious project: it was a question of confidence. We managed to purchase the company. We invested 300 million over six years in the business and we succeeded in our plan. Printemps has found a new leadership in the luxury segment of the market.

This repositioning has implied a heavy overhaul of the stores, including the renovation of the 150-year-old façade. Therefore, when we talk about

long term in our plans, we are definitely talking very long term. Even considering what seems faster, which is the improvement of the quality and skills of our sales staff, six years is a very short time to change the culture in a company 150 years old. All of these activities are long-term ones, but they are all essential to the survival and the success of the business. All these activities are also cash-flow negative in the short term.

My conclusion about the long term and short term is that in truth, if the business is in good shape, there is no trade-off between long term and short term. Short-term efficiency sustains the needs of long-term investment and the two go together. Now, there are times when a business is not in good shape, and Printemps was not in good shape in 2006. Then my belief is that you have to look at the long-term structural change and investment and this is the only way out... provided you have the money to do it.

Now, this is relevant because when we are looking at countries, I think we have the same problem; we are in some way confronted with the same types of issues. We need to make long-term structural changes, which are essential to our survival. I am a firm believer that Europe should be the most competitive place in the world because of the time it had to develop, to create skills... If it is not, and it is clearly showing it is not today, it is because we are making mistakes. It is not just because of a fatality or the fact that Europe is in Europe.

The issue is the markets can provide the money our countries need to invest in this long-term restructuring. However it is for a country as it was for us: a question of credibility. You need to have a credible long-term plan but also have a credible and stable team leading, which in the current political environment is not obvious. This is the point of view of an entrepreneur so it certainly too simple considering the complexity of politics. This also leads me to my other conclusion that is: it is easier to be a shopkeeper than to be a politician these days.

Making Changes Permanent

Jaime García-Legaz Ponce

Spanish Secretary of State for Trade

The outstanding performance of the Spanish external sector has resulted in one of the most dramatic adjustments of the Spanish economy in the last few years. Indeed, the current account deficit has turned from -10% of GDP in 2007 to -1.1% in 2012. It is particularly remarkable that this adjustment has taken place without a real exchange rate depreciation. According to the IMF forecast, Spain will reach 1.3% current account surplus in 2013, increasing further up to 6.2% in 2018

The Spanish external rebalancing is mainly due to bright results in the trade balance, thanks to the steady growth of exports of goods and services. And the reasons behind this evidence are mainly three.

► 1. The ongoing geographic diversification of the Spanish sales abroad

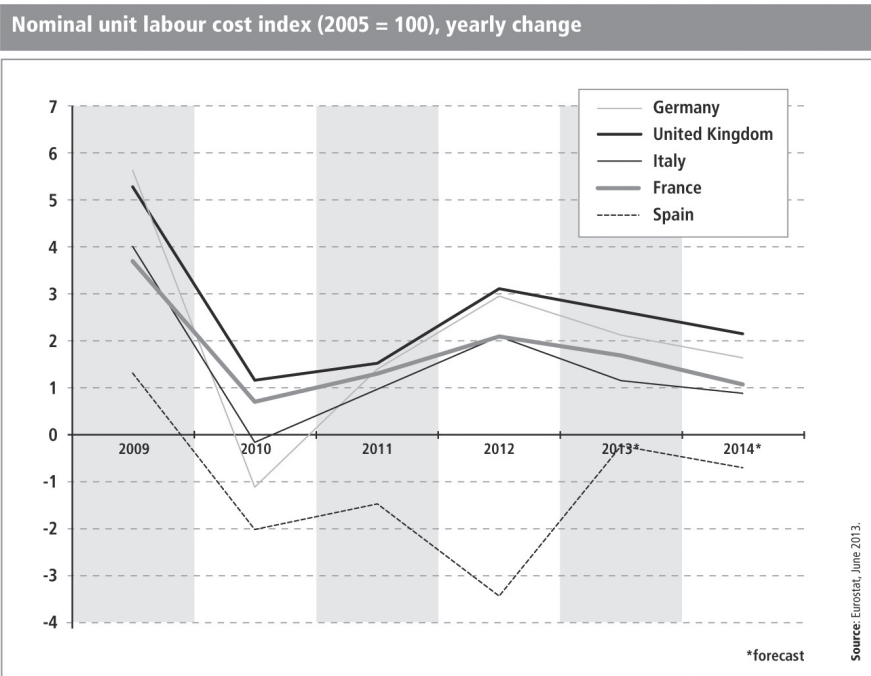
Spain used to have an excessive dependency on EU partners, which accounted for 70.7% of our exports in 2007. However, thanks to an ambitious strategy to open up new markets, this ratio has been cut to 61.7% in 2012 and further down to 61.5% in the first four months of 2013. In fact, exports to Africa are ballooning (+21.5% increase in 2013, particularly to Algeria, +33.8% and to Nigeria, +23.8%), growth rates also being remarkable regarding exports to Latin America (+12.6%, especially to Brazil, +40.9% and to Argentina, +21.6%), to Asia (+22.4, remarkably to China, 18.2% and to the Middle East, +48.9%), and to North America (+9.6%, notably to the US, +8.9%). This way, Spain is currently offsetting the declining sales to the slowly recovering economies in the EU-27 with an increasing presence in the emerging markets with a more promising outlook.

► **2. Increase in the export base.**

In 2012, 136,973 Spanish firms sold products abroad, 11.4% more than in 2011, and 35% more than in 2008. In the first three months of 2013, 70,984 firms exported, 6.8% more than in the same period last year 2012. More importantly, the number of firms that export regularly has risen by 2.9% in 2012 and by 5.8% in the first four months of 2013, changing the previous downward trend (-3.9% in 2011, -1.4% in 2010 and -0.8% in 2009)

► **3. Competitiveness**

The good export performance reflects, at least partly, the important progress made by Spain in compensating past losses of price and cost competitiveness, in contrast to European peers. Spanish unit labor costs have fallen notably since the peak in 2009 in the whole economy, the adjustment in the manufacturing sector being even larger.



The significant drop of unit labor costs in 2012 (-3.4%) is a result of the increase in productivity (+3.2%), as well wage declines (-3.4%, according to Bank of Spain). This is partly the result of the ambitious reform adopted in the labor market. The main measures aim to tackle the high degree of duality by reducing the gap in employment protection between permanent and temporary contracts, streamlining collective bargain in order to bring it to the specific needs of companies approaching the costs of temporary and

permanent work and allowing temporary employment firms to act as private employment agencies, among others.

Notwithstanding, better Spanish export performance may also have been driven by non-price competitiveness gains. According to some studies, (Citi Research, 2013, BBVA Research, 2012), Spain also enjoys an increasing non-price competitiveness, explained by the degree of complexity and connectivity to other sectors, recording a higher rate in both terms compared to the world average. From another point of view, the European Commission highlighted in 2012 that empirical evidence suggests that improvements in total competitiveness (through higher value added or product differentiation), specialization in products with a low price elasticity (medium and medium-low technology content), and geographical diversification are the most important drivers of this comparatively better performance of Spanish exports.

This explains that, according to the WTO data, despite Spain's world market share in goods has decreased somewhat to 1.59% in 2012, this decline has been less pronounced than in the case of other euro-area countries, including Germany.

Regarding the trade of services, Spain has kept the 8th position in the world ranking (3.21% of the total in 2012). Our success is due not only to tourism but increasingly to services to firms, insurance, computer services, transport, and cultural services, among others. This kind of trade is expected to rise in the coming future.

Several factors will contribute to make this adjustment of the current account stay and grow in the medium term. Firstly, resources are being shifted to the tradable sector. The size of exports of goods and services in GDP is increasing notably. According to Eurostat, Spain is now the second among the big five economies in the EU with the highest goods and services export to GDP ratio (32.2% in 2012), well above France (27.4%), Italy (30.3) and United Kingdom (31.7%) and only after Germany (51.5%)

Diversification of our exports to emerging markets will continue. Our strategy in trade policy is focused on new markets outside the EU (emerging economies and OECD markets with high potential, US, Turkey, Morocco, China, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, India, Algeria, Japan, Korea, Gulf countries, Singapore, Indonesia and South Africa)

The progressive improvement of domestic demand from 2014 onwards will surely spur imports (+0.6% expected for 2014, according to the IMF), but the substantially higher growth expected for exports (+5.2% increase in 2014) will result in a considerable trade surplus in 2014 and in the following years

The strategy of the Spanish Government to make these changes structural is mainly focused in regaining competitiveness and fostering

internationalization of firms. In particular, the labour market reform will help to make further progress in terms of gains in productivity and wage moderation, while the recently passed draft Law in support of entrepreneurs and their internationalization includes several measures to boost the external sector.

- The institutional framework and some of the instruments to support internationalization are thoroughly reformed.

- A new and transparent decision-making process is defined to elaborate the Spanish internationalization strategy, resulting in the Strategic Plan for the Internationalization of the Spanish Economy.

- The main financial institutions in support for the internationalization of firms will be substantially powered, in order to address the difficult access to credit.

In sum, Spain is currently overcoming the most difficult economic crises of the recent past. The outstanding performance of the external sector is the result of the gains in competitiveness that will help us build a new growth pattern based on the internationalization of the economy.

Le combat de la différenciation

Nicolas Tissot

Alstom

► Un point de vue particulier sur la compétitivité

Le point de vue d'Alstom est celui d'une entreprise industrielle, globale, cotée, dans un monde en crise.

– Une entreprise industrielle : Alstom fournit des équipements de centrales électriques et de transmission d'électricité ainsi que des systèmes de transport, matériels ferroviaire et de transport urbain, systèmes de signalisation. Cela m'amènera naturellement à parler de sujets tels que la R&D, la technologie ou les implantations industrielles.

– Une entreprise globale, ce qui implique, dans l'environnement actuel, des marchés qui n'ont jamais été aussi vastes. La globalisation est d'abord une opportunité pour Alstom mais il faut reconnaître qu'elle induit aussi l'émergence de nouveaux concurrents dans nos domaines.

– Une entreprise cotée, ce qui induit une tension entre les horizons court et long, avec des stratégies à moyen ou long terme (notamment les cycles de la recherche, de la technologie, de l'investissement, du redéploiement d'environ 20 milliards d'euros de ventes et un carnet de commandes supérieur à 50 milliards d'euros.

► De quel environnement externe avons-nous besoin ?

Nos enjeux sont globaux. Nous avons une présence stable dans une soixantaine de pays et des activités dans une centaine de pays. Notre chiffre d'affaires est désormais à moins de 10% en France. Nous avons donc besoin d'un environnement macroéconomique et microéconomique propice à nos activités, ce qui implique que des réponses soient apportées à tous les niveaux pertinents.

Au niveau global ou européen, les réponses qui nous intéressent sont celles apportées, d'une part en termes d'environnement macroéconomique et monétaire – puisque le change peut devenir rapidement une préoccupation – et d'autre part en termes d'environnement spécifique, en particulier de stratégie industrielle et d'attractivité des territoires pour l'investissement tant dans des implantations industrielles que dans la recherche et développement. Ce qui concerne l'accès à du financement, que ce soit de marché ou intermédié, en fonds propres ou en dette, est aussi essentiel pour notre développement.

Tout l'environnement de l'entreprise est important, y compris la qualité des ressources humaines auxquelles nous avons accès, puisque nous employons plusieurs dizaines de milliers d'ingénieurs à travers le monde. Il est donc crucial pour nous d'avoir accès à des bassins d'emploi et de compétences adéquats à des coûts compétitifs. Ici les réponses peuvent être très nationales ou même locales, en termes de sites, de formation, de fiscalité, etc.

En ce qui concerne la France, Alstom n'a pas abdiqué sur la possibilité d'y réaliser des activités industrielles de façon compétitive. Nous ne réalisons que 10% de notre chiffre d'affaires sur le territoire français mais nous y employons environ 18 000 personnes, soit 20% de nos effectifs globaux. Cela veut dire que ces effectifs français travaillent pour moitié pour l'exportation. Les dispositifs d'appui à l'exportation qui existent dans ce pays comme ailleurs représentent donc un enjeu significatif pour Alstom en nous permettant de maintenir des activités dans des économies matures où les coûts du travail sont élevés. C'est vrai aussi de tout ce qui nous aide à financer la recherche, en particulier le crédit d'impôt recherche en France.

Les territoires où nous choisissons de nous implanter dépendent de cet environnement macro et micro.

► **Quelle stratégie de compétitivité pour une entreprise telle que Alstom ?**

Compétitivité prix et compétitivité hors prix sont la grille de lecture classique.

La compétitivité hors prix est décisive pour les entreprises qui ont une grande partie de leurs implantations dans le monde mature. Nous travaillons, chez Alstom, sur des sujets de différenciation technologique, donc liés à la recherche et développement, mais aussi de qualité et de services. Tous ces domaines impliquent une réinvention permanente de l'entreprise et il est probable que, dans cinq ou dix ans, Alstom ne fera plus du tout la même chose. Certaines de nos activités se «commoditisent» et nous passons à des produits plus sophistiqués qui nous permettent d'affirmer notre différenciation et de nous appuyer sur un niveau technologique plus évolué.

C'est le cas dans tous nos métiers puisque nos nouveaux concurrents, sur le positionnement pur prix, sont capables de nous battre, ce qui ne nous laisse d'autre choix que celui de la compétitivité hors prix. C'est un combat de tous les instants.

Mais l'aspect de compétitivité prix, particulièrement dans un monde en crise, ne peut pas être négligé. Apporter de la technologie ne suffit pas : très souvent, nos clients nous disent : « on veut votre technologie, mais au prix de vos concurrents les moins chers ». Nous avons donc des programmes d'excellence opérationnelle très forts, qui touchent toutes les composantes de coût que ce soient les achats (on achète beaucoup à l'extérieur), la gestion de nos implantations industrielles ou nos frais généraux.

Ce combat, je crois qu'il peut être mené et gagné.

Do not Let the American Corporate Model Win

Sharan Burrow

International Trade Union Confederation

What additional efforts should workers make in order to maintain their companies' competitiveness? It depends on your definition of competitiveness, so let us put that right up front. If you are talking about the failed model of austerity and low-wage competition, then it is a race to the bottom. It is not sustainable; it is driving alarming inequality, the highest unemployment on record, diminished demand and social unrest. These are not the kinds of societies we need, and it is not an environment for sustainable business.

If you look at inequality, OECD figures show that it increased more in the three years to 2010 than in the previous twelve. As we know, inequality is both a social and an economic poison. Wages share fell by 10% in the last decade and up to 30% in some countries in the last three decades. If you take the disposable income in the UK, it is back to 1997 levels. It is not rocket science to understand why businesses are struggling in the short term and consequently, unemployment is frightening people.

I have to take some issue with Spain. Let me congratulate you on the current account surplus, but if it was that easy, you would not have our recent poll result, which I will allude to in a minute. You would not have three generations living off a grandfather's pension; you would not have more than 50% youth unemployment. You would not have some of the most rigid laws on the continent or indeed globally, particularly around mortgages and finance. We could debate Spain all day, and I hope you are heading in the right direction, but I can tell you, the social poison is extraordinary. You only have to walk with me amongst the people and you can see it. But Spain is not alone.

On the other hand, if we are dealing with the integrated drivers of productivity, then we are on track. These are the issues that in a decent society, with decent labor laws and living standards, make businesses competitive. We want this; we have wanted it for 10, 15 and 20 years. I come from a country that watched its economy change: Australia. I no longer live there, but you can tell by the accent that I do not come from Belgium!

In the 1990s, it was in fact the Governments business and labor, which drove the reform of their economy. It has got multi-factor productivity, up to 17% on value-added products. However, I watched it fail too, when in fact it was easier to attack labor with Government and business policy than to actually work it out together. In the early part of this decade, it fell to -2.2%.

► **Pre-conditions for the long term**

There are some pre-conditions, but we are dealing with key areas such as infrastructure, skills, technology, innovation, R&D. These make industry or services competitive. Therefore, these are in the interest of both employees and workers. It requires sustainable competitiveness at long horizon and confidence in the short term.

The long term requires confidence. I can tell you about our poll just out of the field, a global poll of more than half the world's workers. It says that 80% of their Governments have failed on the question of unemployment; they simply have not done enough. I have to tell you that in Spain, it is in fact 94%; in France, it is 91%. It is a poll that includes China, EU Countries, the US and India, so you can understand that this is very serious and very worrisome for us.

If working people are going to enter the dialogue about sustainable business, they have to have confidence. This means that it is going to support their capacity to maintain their family and look after the interests of their community.

Pre-conditions include confidence; business needs confidence, it also needs stable and affordable finance. And I could not agree more that the financial sector continues to fail us. We are interested in the euro funds and I will tell you why. It is because we have 25 trillion dollars of workers' capital invested in the global economy. We are very worried about retirement incomes. We want that money in patient capital, long-term, productive enterprises that actually guarantee a stable and moderate return, not the kind of double-digit rise and fall that we have seen from speculative environment. It is a huge argument between us and our pension-funds trustees. 17 trillion dollars are joint trustees, but sometimes fiduciary responsibility prevents investment in businesses for the long term. We are interested to see where those euro funds that look at unlisted companies over a longer term go.

Social dialogue has got to be critical: social dialogue and collective bargaining. The troika smashed collective bargaining. In Hungary, it has fallen by 75%; in Spain and Portugal, employers are coming to us saying, "Please, we need an unfair competition law; we need you to buy back the confidence. This is a question of actually sitting at the table and working with workers and employers to figure it out."

► **Priorities needed**

Among those, there is investment in infrastructure, particularly in enabling green infrastructure; there are no jobs on a dead planet. There are lots of jobs in investment in that area. There is inclusion for our young people, apprenticeships. Scale them up; scale them up everywhere. We now have an agreement with the business community about quality principles, etc. There is also the informal sector; it is not a North-South divide. G20 countries are at 20-25% and there are countries, which are at 70-80%. In the case of India, it is up to 90%.

If you are withering businesses, then the sustainability of demand is not there and certainly, decent work is not there. We want to work through those things in social dialogue. However, if we want the agreed work-organization practices both in industry and indeed in services, then you have to have the trust of collective bargaining. Workers have to see that it is not about more of the same. It is not a 20th century model of capitalism that simply puts more profit or more shareholder dollars back into the environment and withers their wages. There have got to be the social model ambitions of Europe, and I would say save them at any cost.

I already talked about the banking sector. Frankly, we think the banks are not geared up at the moment to look at the real economy. They are throwing billions and billions of dollars into making sure that their current activities are not eroded. There is more speculative activity now than there was before the crisis; that is simply not productive, it does not drive competitiveness.

And of course there are skills: skills, skills and more skills. I just looked at the German demand from some of their major industrial companies, but I am sure it is similar in the service areas. Some 1,400 companies have shown continuous growth rates in the past 10 years; they are all globalised. They have high productivity based on employee involvement, autonomy in the job, up-skilling, genuine lean philosophy, etc. We know all of those things work when they are agreed. However in fact, let me tell you that unless we get back to that table in the context of proper macro-economic policy, then it will not work.

► **What about flexibility?**

I just want to say something about flexibility. If we are talking about flexibility around skills and work and so on, let us get at it, but let us not simply say we hire if we fire the mother or the father supporting a family, hire the son or daughter. That is not doing something about youth employment and something about our communities. It is simply not. I frankly have such respect for the European social model, but you are losing it and you must protect it at all costs.

We all want the bullet of export-led growth, but it is not a magic bullet for everybody; not everyone can export. When you are talking about internal devaluation, think about why you are doing that and what it is that you are going to build those non price competitive advantages around.

Finally, let me say that you cannot deal with this without addressing the supply-chain question. You cannot ignore the supply chains of the rest of the world. We agreed in Pascal Lamy's trade-review panel that this has to be tackled. I only have to say "Bangladesh", and you will understand the European companies responsibly working it out with labor, versus the American companies. Frankly, you cannot lose the European social model. It is the basis of your productivity and your competitiveness. Do not let the American corporate model win.

Échanges

Philippe Mabilie, La Tribune

A simple question, Sharan: a lot of people say that the French social dialogue is not very good.

Sharan Burrow

Can I actually say that I talk to the French unions all the time? You are making headway; you are sitting at the table. These things do not happen overnight, but you have people who care about French industries, and they are in your trade-unions. Talk to them.

Philippe Mabilie

Jean-Luc Placet, vous êtes membres de droit via le SYNTEC du comité exécutif du MEDEF, est-ce que vous pensez qu'il faut hausser le ton vis-à-vis des pouvoirs publics pour aller plus loin ? Je rappelle deux ou trois chiffres, le CICE c'est bien, mais le principal bénéficiaire du Crédit Impôt Compétitivité et Emploi, c'est La Poste. Ce n'était pas forcément l'objectif poursuivi au départ. Pensez qu'il faut à la rentrée qu'il y ait un patronat plus offensif vis-à-vis du gouvernement ?

Jean-Luc Placet

Je crois que ce qu'il ne faut surtout pas faire, c'est hausser le ton. Je crois que aussi bien Laurence Parisot que Pierre Gattaz, le nouveau Président du MEDEF, le pensent. Il s'agit plus de continuer et prolonger ce qui a été fait. Le CICE c'est très bien, mais il faut faire autre chose à côté. Encore une fois 2,5 SMIC, c'est parfois compliqué pour des entreprises ou pour des métiers à haute valeur ajoutée. Mais je crois qu'il faut privilégier avant tout la qualité du dialogue social fondé sur un échange d'informations économiques : moins de politique ou moins d'idéologie, et plus d'échange d'informations pour faire des *deals*, ou en tout cas essayer d'aboutir à un consensus. Je crois que la nouvelle équipe, avec Jean-François Pilliard notamment, en est tout à fait convaincue.

Sébastien Hulésie, lauréat du concours «Inventez 2020»

Ma question porte sur les récentes annonces de taxation des panneaux solaires chinois à l'entrée de l'Union européenne. Ne reflètent-elles pas une perte de compétitivité de l'Union ?

Sharan Burrow

This is a really complex environment. However, I can tell you that just a few months ago, I took a group of senior trade-union leaders to the biggest solar panel manufacturer in China. This is in Hubei province, just outside of Beijing. You have got to weigh it up. What is the basis on which there is a fair environment where we can invest in the skills that are necessary for future technologies? No country wants to be left out of that.

At the same time, we have got to say, "What is the fulcrum?" There are 350,000 jobs in construction and services in Europe as a result of that one factory manufacturing. People misunderstand China. They are not interested in a low-wage future. They are rolling out collective bargaining at a rate of knots. They are cautious, because they want to get it right. However, that factory has increased their wages four times in the last 10 years and they have now got quite reasonable wages given the Chinese living standard.

However, they are now doing what Germany did at the start of the crisis; they are actually bargaining around. We would call it concession bargaining, short term working hours, saving jobs and moderating wages, because of the argument with Europe. This takes everybody, and this is why people like Bernard Spitz and I are so committed to global dialogue. We have to sit at the table in all of the countries' interests. That is the kind of debate we were having about supply chains, which Pascal Lamy and me were having on the future of trade. It is a very critical question. Does anybody have the answers? No, but do we have to have some global fairness and opportunity for everybody in technologies in the future?

Nicolas Tissot

Un mot sur les panneaux solaires pour dire d'abord que stratégiquement nous avons choisi de ne pas être dans ce métier parce que nous avons considéré, et c'est dans la logique de ce que je vous ai dit, que nous n'avions pas de capacité de différenciation suffisante, hors prix, dans ce domaine.

À un moment donné, il est clair que les importations de panneaux solaires en Europe ont reposé sur des systèmes d'incitation en faveur de leur installation qui se traduisaient par des impôts supplémentaires, et je pense que c'était-là une situation qui n'était pas tolérable et qu'elle est d'ailleurs en voie de se corriger de façon à ce que cette offre ne reçoive pas de subventions qui pèsent de fait sur le citoyen européen.

Question du public

L'euro évite des dévaluations externes, évidemment vous l'avez tous dit. Cela veut dire que le seul ajustement possible pour restaurer la compétitivité, c'est effectivement les dévaluations internes avec évidemment les réserves de tout ce qui peut être fait hors coûts en termes d'innovation, etc. Mais cela veut dire qu'il y a une prime pour les pays comme l'Allemagne qui ont une tradition longue de dialogue, de cogestion ; et évidemment une décote ou un handicap pour les pays comme la France où malheureusement le dialogue social n'a jamais vraiment fonctionné. Comment mettre en place un dialogue permanent pour éviter des chocs de dévaluation interne ?

Maurizio Borletti

Le problème n'est pas très différent en Italie. C'est aujourd'hui un problème de représentativité. Les entreprises ont besoin d'un vrai dialogue social avec leurs salariés qui peut être très constructif, mais il est essentiel qu'il y ait une vraie démocratie et une vraie représentativité de l'autre côté. Si on discute avec nos syndicats de problématiques qui ne sont pas les problématiques réelles du corps social, on ne va nulle part. Et c'est souvent là que se situe le blocage en France.

Les adhésions aux syndicats sont faibles, et pour moi c'est un gros problème car on discute souvent avec un partenaire qui n'est pas toujours le bon.

Sharan Burrow

I just want to give you two examples. You raised Italy. Can I say that Italian politics defeat me? Nevertheless, I just looked at the agreement struck by all of the unions with the employers around representivity at the national level. This will drive down into the firms; it is very mature.

There was an agreement early in the crisis in Spain that was one of the best I have seen. It was a commitment between both unions and the employers that they would moderate wages and they would keep their wages below a percentage point. I cannot remember the actual figure, but it is a percentage point or a fraction thereof, below the GDP increases. The commitment from employers is that they would re-invest that in jobs. It is very mature. Then there is an arrangement for the longer term when growth returns.

The troika ignored it. The International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank ignored it. Consequently, since then, I can tell you that in all of these countries, I can have a conversation with employers and a conversation with workers that actually makes much more sense than the international institutions. We have got a failure in international institutions and we need to get back to that genuine joint concern. This is because we are joined at the hip with sustainable business and decent work. I would just say "Let us have some really deep, decent social dialogue. It is not about just one vested interest or another."

Jean-Luc Placet

L'État demande aux organisations syndicales et patronales de se mettre d'accord sur un certain nombre de sujets. C'est ce qui a été fait avec l'ANI du 11 janvier, et c'est ce qui va continuer à se faire. C'est là que se fait la mutation. Ayons confiance.

Agnès Bénassy-Quéré

Je suis enchantée de cette table ronde car je repars avec des conclusions très claires. D'abord sur ce que la compétitivité n'est pas : il y a eu une sorte de consensus sur le fait que ce n'est pas la peine de discuter à l'infini sur coûts versus hors coûts, c'est hors sujet. Le secteur exposé/abrité, c'est hors sujet. Le taux de change m'a l'air également presque hors sujet, même si il y a eu une petite allusion. La guerre commerciale, ce n'est pas vraiment le sujet.

Cela nous permet donc de nous concentrer sur court terme *vs* long terme qui est vraiment le sujet. Même si on ne met pas forcément les mêmes éléments dans le court terme et dans le long terme, il y aura des discussions. Mais évidemment, pour surmonter un arbitrage court terme/long terme, il nous faut un système financier dont la vocation est justement de nous permettre d'investir, et donc de décaler des ressources dans le temps. Cela nous amène au système bancaire au cœur de la compétitivité.

Deux autres éléments m'ont aussi beaucoup frappée :

– Le dialogue social comme une sorte d'actif de la compétitivité qui doit produire un rendement. Il faut donc investir dans le dialogue social et éviter le poison social selon l'expression de Sharan Burrow.

– l'implémentation de la stratégie, importante au niveau des entreprises, mais également au niveau des politiques publiques. Il peut y avoir des politiques extrêmement bien définies, mais qui ratent leur but dans leur mise en œuvre.