



Towards a more resilient, sustainable and fair Europe

Forward by

Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President, European Commission responsible for Interinstitutional relations and Foresight

In the midst of an unprecedented public health crisis, the past weeks and months have been a difficult time for us all. Separated from our loved ones, our friends, our colleagues, fighting to keep some sense of normalcy, especially for our children, it would be easy to lose hope. But it's worth holding our hopes and our dreams close – whether they be short-term, like reuniting with those we have been isolated from, or whether they be long-term; our grand desires for the future.

Covid-19 will undoubtedly have a long-term effect on the world. It is poised to accelerate the challenges and trends already facing us today. The twin digital and green transition, Europe's strategic autonomy in key areas, a shifting global order and the pressure being put on our democracies by, for example, disinformation are all issues we must meet head-on – especially as they are being magnified by the ongoing pandemic.

Given how our everyday lives have been so sorely tested, drawing lessons from this crisis of such global magnitude – and what it means for the future of Europe – will be key. **I believe that a more resilient, more sustainable and fairer Europe can emerge from the pandemic.**

It is therefore worth looking at a recent study carried out by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, FEPS, entitled 'What is the European Dream?'



Last year, researchers spoke to 14,000 Europeans – 1,000 each in the 14 most populated EU Member States – in an effort to discover whether they continue to share the dreams of the Union’s founders: the dreams of a united Europe; a continent of peace and shared prosperity, where borders are torn down and diversity celebrated. A Europe where even in times of severe crisis, solidarity remains the watchword.

The headline result from the study is perhaps the clear understanding that Europeans still consider Europe to be the best place in the world to live. In addition, greater financial security and higher living standards – including the ability to enjoy more free time – were identified by respondents as the keys to happiness.

The fundamental rights which form the building blocks of the Union – democracy, equality and solidarity – are of great importance to Europeans. And Europeans want – and deserve – a greater say in political decision-making.

At the same time, there is real concern for the future. Only one in four respondents believe that future generations will have a better life than their own. A third believe that quality of life will fall.

And this is before the emergence of the Covid-19. Frankly, if the study were to be carried out today, the results would likely be a lot bleaker, as the current crisis has caused a great deal of uncertainty. Now more than ever, people will look to Europe for answers – and our Europe must have everyone’s back.

Once we have overcome the immediate health challenges posed by the pandemic, **we must put in place a Marshall Plan for Europe’s recovery.** Our economies will need a strong shot in the arm to get back on their feet.

The European Commission is doing its utmost to help Member States on every front, mobilising all its existing tools and proposing new ones in order to protect people’s livelihoods. The EU’s next seven-year budget will be at the centre of our collective efforts.

We have also been combatting an increase in disinformation around the way we are handling the pandemic. Some have even questioned Europe and the value of European-level action in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. **But the truth matters.** And neither of these will distract us from our commitment to our work, and to our citizens across the Union.



Despite what the doomsayers may claim, I believe the future of Europe remains bright. One interesting statistic from the FEPS study says that while 55% of people chose their national identity as more important than their status as Europeans, a majority of younger people – 57% of those aged 18-24 – picked the latter.

Europe itself still remains an idea. Europeans still dream of Europe.

All this will no doubt feed into the EU’s Conference on the Future of Europe, a pan-European exercise and a forum for debate amongst European citizens, the outcomes of which will then be taken into account in EU policy-making.

The Conference will provide the opportunity for Europeans to directly help shape the future of Europe. It must therefore reach every corner of Europe.

And we must consider the lessons to be learned from Covid-19, as with any major crisis. No one could have predicted the magnitude of the outbreak – all of us have been affected and tested in ways we could barely have imagined. Likewise, no one could have been fully prepared for such an event. Nonetheless, **in the face of such an enormous challenge, Europe has shown its value.** We must now ensure that we become more resilient and better prepared for such large-scale shocks in future.

About the author

Maroš Šefčovič

Vice- President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight, European Commission

About the publication

The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and **Policy Solutions** joined forces with the objective of answering the following question: **is there a European Dream?** And if so, what sort of hopes and expectations do European citizens have for the future? Art. 2 of the Lisbon Treaty outlines the dream that the founding fathers had for the European Union (EU) as a political project – that one of a united and progressive Europe that promotes peace and the well-being of its peoples. FEPS and Policy Solutions present “[The EU Dream report](#)” that offers insights to answer this question and that aims to contribute with progressive thinking and ideas to the Future of Europe debate and conference. [The results of this extraordinary research are based on a comprehensive survey conducted in 14 EU member states with over 14,000 survey respondents offering thus a representative view as to how European citizens perceive and value the EU.](#) This is the FEPS way of shaking up the debate on what Europeans are dreaming of and how they see Europe addressing the most pressing contemporary challenges and where the Union is expected to strive for more!