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Lauri Finér

Hana Jalloul

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Nicola Zingaretti

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The Progressive Post

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This magazine was published with the financial support of the European Parliament.
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N°26 - Autumn/Winter

ISSN 2506-7362



by Hedwig Giusto

2024 was announced as a super-election year, with citizens in more than 60 countries worldwide due to head to the polls to choose either a new president or parliament. As far as Europe was concerned, general elections were held in nine countries, including the UK and – unexpectedly – France, and at the European level, elections were held to choose new MEPs. The year is ending, and looking back one cannot but notice that this super-election year has caused havoc in many countries where these elections took place. France is still struggling with instability, presidential elections were cancelled in Romania, and the European Union has, for the first time, seen its traditional majority shaking – the traditional majority that has historically sustained the Commission president.

In most cases, the electorate punished the incumbents, but the outcomes were not entirely unforeseen. Nevertheless, they were certainly shocking and called for a profound reflection on the mainstream parties' inability to read, understand and respond to citizens' concerns.

This is particularly true for the US elections, where half the voters, who perceived themselves as neglected or abandoned, crowned Donald Trump for a second term. Although the tycoon's victory was far from surprising, a sigh of dismay has gone out worldwide. What is to be expected from a second Trump term? Where will his erratic choices lead the US and, consequently, the world?

The new Trump administration is still in the making – some of the appointments of the president-designate may not be confirmed by the Senate or by the president himself, whose mood might suddenly change. But there are some forecasts on Trump's priorities that can be made based on his previous tenure and his current picks for key posts. A focus on the US electorate's attitude and concerns, and what this means for the future

of the Democrats as well as for the road ahead under the new president, is at the core of this issue's **Special Coverage US elections: more than angry men**.

The shift to the right is, unfortunately, a common trend in other Western countries too. A growing number of EU member states are now being governed by far-right parties. How do these parties translate their apparent pro-worker rhetoric into policies? In our **Focus The far right demolishes the welfare state**, we look in particular at how the governments of Finland, Hungary and Italy are dismantling labour and social protections, with the result that the rich are becoming richer and inequalities are deepening.

Welfare systems are also increasingly under strain in Europe because of demographic trends. Our continent is quickly ageing, and the social structure of European societies is consequently changing. One of the biggest challenges of our future will, therefore, be to build longevity societies where people can live longer and well. While simplistic calls to encourage childbearing are not enough, what the **Dossier The demographic transition: risks and opportunities** sets out is the role that the promotion of inclusive, human-centred and rights-based policies, as well as migration, can play in tackling demographic imbalances.

Another challenge for the European Union is protecting the rule of law, which is currently under attack in some EU member states, and fighting corruption. The latter is increasingly perceived as a threat to democracy. For this reason, the Union is currently equipping itself with instruments to fight corruption and, thus, create a transparent and healthy environment where economies and societies can thrive. In the **Dossier Blunt weapons? Europe's fight against corruption** our authors analyse the efficiency and impact of some of these instruments.

Editorial



Hedwig Giusto,
Editor-in-chief



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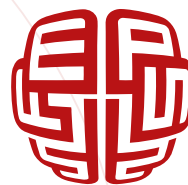
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CURRENT AFFAIRS

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A summit of the future in New York

by Maria João Rodrigues

Is it still possible to reform global governance? Despite the complex international situation – Trumpism in the US and authoritarian trends in other countries, pandemics, wars in Ukraine and the Middle East – the UN Secretary-General has launched a forward-looking agenda to reform the United Nations. The first step was a summit on the Sustainable Development Goals last year, but a more significant moment occurred in New York on 22-23 September 2024, when the Summit of the Future adopted the Pact for the Future.

The current gap between global challenges and global governance is obvious to all of us. The United Nations system was created from the ashes of the second world war, and since then it has been at the core of global governance. It has been able to undertake decolonisation and to prevent a nuclear holocaust during the cold war. Today, however, this multilateral system is clearly outdated. And it is perceived as not inclusive, unfair and ineffective.

► *Among difficult negotiations on multiple fronts, relevant outcomes were nevertheless enshrined in the Pact for the Future, although certain shortcomings are also visible.*

The composition of the UN bodies, notably the Security Council, does not reflect today's world. The role of civil society stakeholders remains too limited, while the role of organised macro-regions – like the European Union or the African Union – is not being used to its full potential.

This multilateral system is now performing poorly even in the face of glaring emergencies such as climate change, pandemics, hunger, poverty, an unregulated AI and hard military conflicts where basic rules such as territorial integrity are not being respected. **Among difficult negotiations on multiple fronts, relevant outcomes were nevertheless enshrined in the Pact for the Future, although certain shortcomings are also visible.** While the agenda for the sustainable development goals (SDGs) – currently the only consensual multilateral agenda – is lagging behind its 2030 objectives, a new significant commitment has been reached on the creation of a larger toolbox of financial instruments.

However, a real process to implement national strategic plans supported by stronger global initiatives is still to be organised.

A historical agreement has also been reached to define a UN tax convention, but the way to protect tax resources that are to be invested in sustainable development and in poverty reduction is still unclear, adding to a dramatic debt burden which is crippling many developing countries, particularly in Africa. **In the face of the climate emergency, the objective of phasing out carbon emissions, and particularly fossil fuels, has been kept, but a stronger multilateral body to conduct the ecological transition is still to be defined, overseeing the effectiveness of the current COPs.**

Access to knowledge, education, science and technology is recognised as a key leverage point for development. However, no agreement has yet been reached on the reform of intellectual property rights or on the way to promote technological cooperation and



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co-creation on a much larger scale, starting with green industrialisation and job creation in developing countries. Without this, the current dilemma between climate and poverty in many developing countries cannot be solved.

A Global Digital Compact has – finally! – been adopted in order to shape the digital potential for sustainable development and to control risks for freedom and democracy. Nevertheless, there is clear resistance to building up multilateral bodies governing the digital transition. These outcomes and shortcomings of the Pact for the Future are the visible face of turbulent confrontation between political forces on the different fronts of global negotiation to prepare for the UN Summit of the Future.

Developing countries are trying to upgrade their voice and representation. Emerging countries, such as India, Brazil and South Africa, are raising the stakes of these negotiations with richer countries, notably using

the G20 Club that they have been chairing. The geostrategic competition between the US and China is visible on all fronts, especially on the digital front, where both countries prefer a bilateral framework negotiation to a multilateral one, particularly when dealing with the great game changer that is now coming to the fore – artificial intelligence.

► *A Global Digital Compact has – finally! – been adopted in order to shape the digital potential for sustainable development and to control risks for freedom and democracy.*

Last but not least, it was painful to see how Russia tried to block several compromises and the entire Pact with the tactical purpose of paving

► *In the face of the climate emergency, the objective of phasing out carbon emissions, and particularly fossil fuels, has been kept, but a stronger multilateral body to conduct the ecological transition is still to be defined, overseeing the effectiveness of the current COPs.*

the way for its longer-term strategic objectives. The country was nevertheless eventually defeated in the plenary by a large majority of member states. The visibility and clarity of the European Union's positions meanwhile remained quite low and indistinct, reflecting the current situation of transition towards a new political leadership after the recent European elections. It is nevertheless important for stronger European progressive voices to be heard on this world stage, in an open dialogue with many other stakeholders across the world.



Maria João Rodrigues,
FEPS President



Europe, hold your nerve!

by László Andor

Following the election of the European Parliament leadership and the EP's vote on the college of commissioners, attention in Brussels will now have to shift from personnel to policies. However, what the people decided in June must and will have a bearing on the policy agenda. The question is how leaders read the messages of the citizens.

The June European Parliament elections unleashed a fascination with the radical right, hard-right and far-right tendencies across the continent but also worldwide. Much more attention was paid to the parties that increased their share of mandates than to those which suffered the setback. But the two sides are equally important. A simple, but often helpful, observation is that if a country has had elections recently, the European Parliament election tends to confirm those results, while if it has a 'mid-term' nature, the swing goes against the incumbents. For example, the European Parliament election in Portugal or Spain largely confirmed the outcome of the national elections held in those countries just a few months before, while in France and Germany, the opposite was the case.

Since larger countries like France and Germany drive the volumes much more than smaller ones like Ireland or Hungary, this factor explains much about the shrinking of the liberal and green groups, and the surge of the far right. **The German SPD's setback was somewhat compensated by the surge of the French PS, while in Germany the CDU-CSU perhaps benefitted from the protest mood even more than the far-right AfD** (given that there had been massive demonstrations against the latter, but not against the former).

One should pay attention to the normalisation factor here. Years before, the memory of the second world war kept far-right parties toxic, and it was shameful to vote for them. Today, many no longer consider them as vicious, as they did in the past, not least because in many cases the centre-right has abolished the firewalls and teamed up with the far right to govern countries or regions together. This started in Austria, but now the list includes Czechia, Italy, Finland, Netherlands, Sweden and soon Belgium too. Member state level political developments since June reflect the knock-on effects of the European Parliament elections. The positions of the incumbent French and German leaderships remain precarious. In France, however, the pop-up Popular Front turned out to be a resounding success and potentially a game changer in view of the 2027 presidential elections. A comparable silver lining in Germany is absent.

In the UK, the game has already changed after the July snap elections, with the shambolic Conservatives moving to the opposition. The new government led by Keir Starmer quickly trashed the Tories' barmy 'Rwanda scheme' to tackle the question of immigration in more constructive ways. The new Labour government is also preparing and has shown

determination to improve working conditions through legislation and to solve the fiscal conundrum as well.

► *The German SPD's setback was somewhat compensated by the surge of the French PS, while in Germany the CDU-CSU perhaps benefitted from the protest mood even more than the far-right AfD.*

The composition of the new European Commission was finalised after the ritual hearings in the European Parliament and an unusual tug-of-war between the major political forces. As often, how many men or women have seats in the College of Commissioners was a popular talking point. However, **from the day of entry into office, the question is what those commissioners will do in Brussels, irrespective of gender. If one theme stands out from the dense re-election speech of the re-confirmed Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, it is competitiveness.**



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Europe is facing a daunting economic challenge, and it is not of similar nature to those in previous crises. Italy's former prime minister, Mario Draghi, presented a report on the topic in September. It has become a major point for debate and will remain one for the foreseeable future.

Since the word competitiveness carries different content for different people, a number of questions can be raised. Why is competitiveness discussed instead of growth, which is concrete and measurable? Why do we refrain from discussing actual economic performance and instead focus on something that was already found to be a bogus concept at the time of the eurozone crisis? What role could EU level industrial policy play to enhance productivity and ensure that growth is reconciled with sustainability and cohesion?

Progressives should be ready not only to respond but also to promote their own goals and policies. Given that the revised set of

fiscal rules will not deliver us from the evil of austerity, it is important to continue the campaign for an EU-level fiscal capacity that could support common investment objectives, but also counter-cyclical stabilisation.

► *From now on, the real question is what those commissioners will do in Brussels, irrespective of their gender. If one theme stands out from the dense re-election speech of the prolonged Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, it is competitiveness.*

Much attention currently revolves around the future (or lack of it) for the Green Deal

– and several new commissioners are ready to make a quixotic effort to prolong it, even if some revisions will be inevitable. **Crucially for European workers, it is not obvious what EU-level measures will be at the heart of a new social agenda. However, such an agenda must emerge, confirming the Porto social targets.** The social question is particularly important today for a variety of reasons. One of the most important ones is the recent electoral swing to the far right in Europe, in which the preferences of young men played a major role. This is bound to be a topic of further sociological research because without addressing the causes of that swing, any fight against the far right might remain futile. Reasons might be diverse, starting from the fact that in the last 15 years, finding a first stable job for young people has become much harder than before. This also applies to young women, but they are more likely to support centrist or leftist views due to their opinions, among others, on reproductive rights.



Since Covid-19, the first job for many young people has been in the platform economy, meaning low wages and inferior working conditions. And what is attractive for younger women in progressive politics, like the promotion of gender equality, might be seen as an outright threat by less educated men, who therefore look for the protectors of their status. In addition, since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, some younger men surely fear the return of conscription. The perspective of wholesale militarisation is not attractive, and voting for the populist right might be a way to voice dissent.

Such hypotheses have been corroborated by the recent election outcomes in the German states of Thuringia and Saxony and most likely through the – now cancelled – Romanian presidential election. Europeans should worry about Germany. While the focus during the autumn months was on the East, we can say more broadly that the EU country most shaken by the developments of the last three years is Germany. The upheaval of international trade and investment relations, and the unprecedented scale of refugee arrivals, have both tested the country's resilience. For sure there have been some unforced errors as well, like upholding the totemic *Schuldenbremse* (debt brake), the harsh obligations on households in the name of climate policy, or the accelerated closure of nuclear power plants. Germans must find a way out of this situation – in their own interest, as well as in the interest of Europe, which should be ready to help. This time we should not ask what Germany can do for us, but what we can do for Germany.

► *It is not apparent what EU-level measures should be at the heart of a new social agenda, but such an agenda must emerge, with confirmation of the Porto social targets.*



*László Andor,
FEPS Secretary General*

The courage to fight

by Nicola Zingaretti

The second von der Leyen Commission officially started its mandate on 2 December. We often hear that, following Trump's election in the US, Europe must seize the opportunity to leap towards further integration. And indeed, now is the moment to act, without further delay, investing in favour of new policies that support the green and digital transitions and that extend the use of qualified majority voting. We must also devise a new model for our common foreign and defence policies, promote energy autonomy, and push for a new welfare model that focuses on housing and health.

Europe's political leadership must be urged to take these steps. Indeed, the idea of taking a leap towards further integration is at the core of the Draghi report – which was published before Trump's electoral victory. However, there is a danger that Trump's election may strengthen the temptation in Europe to vote for anti-systemic and anti-European parties because his new administration will offer the opportunity for bilateral relations with individual EU member states – and not with the Union as a whole. If accepted, these bilateral relations could reinforce the idea of a 'minimalist Europe' as opposed to the idea of a 'maximalist Europe', which is what we actually need.

After years of inertia, it was only because of the Covid pandemic, and the commitment of the European progressive forces that the EU finally decided to issue common debt – for the first time in its history. Yet after this short intermezzo, we now seem to be shifting back to the old minimalist approach, which can today count on greater

support than before the pandemic. Out of 27 EU member states, 22 are now governed by conservative alliances that favour an inter-governmental model for the European Union. Furthermore, out of 720 MEPs, 217 belong to far-right and nationalist parties. Against this background, there are two important issues to be addressed.

► *After years of inertia, it was only because of the Covid pandemic, and the commitment of the European progressive forces that the EU finally decided to issue common debt – for the first time in its history.*

First, we need to regain the trust of European citizens in democracy. After 1989, European democracies suffered the consequences of globalisation and experienced structural difficulties that hindered growth and development. This in turn deepened inequalities

and caused a feeling of abandonment among citizens, which then fed into a sense of rage, mistrust and disenchantment with the power system. What has today emerged is what we could call an 'individualistic anti-globalism' which has replaced a sort of 'solidary globalism'. This individualistic approach first made its way into the traditional European right – which then became a more aggressive right. The same approach then made its way into the left and, eventually, even into the democratic system. We must therefore first acknowledge that the problem is not the leaders of the right and far-right parties, but the reasons that cause people to vote for them. We must formulate a credible and sustainable idea of development that puts the people and their well-being at its centre. And this can only be done at European level.

Second, **we must pursue the idea that a continental economy, and a political Europe that is strong and humane at the same time, are the axes of our democracy. The nation-state can no longer be the only focus.**



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Nationalism is not another idea of Europe – it is the denial of it. We will now start witnessing new attacks against Europe, which will simply represent another step in a process that is already ongoing. How can we face this challenge? The path is narrow, but there is one. It is the 401-vote majority that supported Ursula von der Leyen last July. This majority is being attacked by far-right forces, and it will continue to be so. But we must defend it. It will not be protected by President von der Leyen who, in her last speech in Strasbourg, only mentioned the words 'freedom' and 'competitiveness', while deleting 'solidarity'.

We need courage to fight. As said previously, the balance of power in the member states is currently in favour of the right. We must not let this happen at the European level too. If we want to contain the far-right forces, we will have to negotiate on every single issue. And the agenda that we believe in and support will be our compass. We must not give in. And we must vote 'no', when this is needed. We have already done this on the budget and on the

deforestation regulation, a pillar of the Green Deal, which has been affected by dangerous amendments. The majority to act in this way exists. And whoever on the left has decided to stay out of this majority is wrong. We cannot afford to be just the champions of ideas when it is time for action. For many years, Europe has been avant-garde. Today, it is entrenched. Progressives will work not just to maintain our position but also to move forward.

- ▶ *We must pursue the idea that a continental economy, and a political Europe that is strong and humane at the same time, are the axes of our democracy. The nation-state can no longer be the focus.*

This article was originally published in Italian on the website tpi.it.



*Nicola Zingaretti,
Head of the Italian
S&D delegation in the
European Parliament*

Palestine and Israel's cycle of tragedy

by Hana Jalloul

It has been over a year since Hamas's terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the start of Israel's ensuing military offensive in Gaza. Over 43,300 Palestinians and 1,200 Israelis have been killed so far. For decades, the Palestinians' tragedy has been left to fester, with little meaningful international action to end their suffering and bring about a just solution.

An article published by *The Lancet* in July 2024 estimates that the number of deaths related to the conflict (due to malnutrition or the lack of healthcare) had reached 186,000 by June that year. The United Nations (UN) has warned of a strong and imminent likelihood of famine in the northern areas of Gaza. Additionally, it has been reported that Israeli authorities are obstructing the entry of humanitarian aid into northern Gaza, where ongoing hostilities have left approximately 75,000 people with severe shortages of food and water.

Although the humanitarian tragedy of this war is chilling, with the highest daily death toll of the 21st century, there is one crucial point that needs to be highlighted: **the Palestinian people have been trapped and abandoned in this spiral of violence since 1948. That was the year the state of Israel was created, and when the Nakba (Arabic for 'catastrophe') occurred**, which saw 15,000 Palestinians killed and 750,000 expelled from their homes. In 1967, Israel occupied Gaza and the West Bank, forcing another 300,000 Palestinians to leave their homes. Since October 2023, the

Israeli government has caused the forced displacement of almost 2 million people in Gaza, without providing safe passage, a final destination or basic humanitarian needs.

► *The Palestinian people have been trapped and abandoned in this spiral of violence since 1948, when the state of Israel was created, and the Nakba occurred.*

In addition to the ongoing humanitarian aid crisis, the Israeli parliament passed a bill in October 2024 banning the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) from operating in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Established in 1949 through UN Resolution 302, UNRWA has played a vital role in providing essential health, education and social services to Palestinians. For 75 years,

the agency has been a cornerstone of civilian relief for Palestinian refugees. However, the current ban has far-reaching consequences, severely undermining the provision of critical services to vulnerable civilians. Moreover, it represents a direct attack on the United Nations system and the principles of multilateralism.

Faced with this situation, the United Nations International Court of Justice (ICJ) confirmed in July what we have known for decades: the Israeli government is violating international law in various ways through the occupation and colonisation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, and the subsequent apartheid regime there. This apartheid is manifested through institutional discrimination. Apartheid is recognised and prohibited by several international treaties, such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and various United Nations resolutions. The International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid of 1973 and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998 also consider apartheid a crime against humanity.



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In the West Bank, occupation and apartheid has been carried out through the confiscation of over a third of the land, the demolition of homes and the expansion of illegal settlements, reaching over 700,000 settlers in 2022. More than 640 checkpoints within the territory restrict peoples' movements.

- ▶ *Gaza has been under an air, sea and land blockade for over 16 years, imposed by Israel since 2005, when then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon dismantled settlements and withdrew soldiers from the Gaza Strip.*

Additionally, there is a two-tier legal system that privileges Israelis and suspends basic civil rights for Palestinians. This situation has worsened over the past year, with more attacks, murders and military incursions by the Israeli

army. In the West Bank, 732 people have been killed since October 2023, according to OCHA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). **Gaza has been under an air, sea and land blockade for over 16 years, imposed by Israel since 2005, when then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon dismantled settlements and withdrew soldiers from the Gaza Strip.** A year later, Hamas won the elections. Since then, there have been three terrible conflicts in 2014, 2021 and 2023.

Further developments in the international legal framework have occurred following the first anniversary of 7 October. On 21 November 2024, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Gaza between at least 8 October 2023 and 20 May 2024. The court also issued an arrest warrant for Hamas's military commander Yahya Sinwar, although Israel claims he was killed in an air-strike in Gaza in July.

All signatory countries of the Rome Statute are required to enforce the arrest warrant, including European Union member states. Most of these EU countries have accepted the warrant, with the notable exception of Hungary, which has formally invited Prime Minister Netanyahu to visit. Italy, the Czech Republic and Estonia have criticised the arrest warrant, although they have agreed to comply. France has argued that since Israel did not sign the Rome Statute, Israel is entitled to uphold the immunity of its leaders, including Prime Minister Netanyahu. Non-European signatories, such as Argentina, have rejected the warrant. The United States, while not a signatory of the Rome Statute, has also opposed the arrest warrant. Independently of the legal process and its implications, these arrest warrants send a clear message that rejects impunity for these crimes at the international level.

An immediate ceasefire and the end of hostilities is desperately needed. It is urgent to release all hostages and return the deceased to their families. The suffering of the families of Israeli hostages must also be recognised.

- *To advance towards a lasting peace, it is essential to end the occupation, halt the expansion of illegal settlements and return to the 1967 borders, as outlined in United Nations Security Council Resolution 242.*

Of course, Israel has the right to live in peace and security. Jews have been persecuted for centuries and continue to suffer hatred in many parts of the world. However, we should not stop saying clearly that what the Israeli government has been doing in Palestine for years is illegal and dangerous. It sets a precedent, delegitimising international law, as we are currently witnessing. Moreover, it is not, as Netanyahu insists, a symptom of anti-Semitism.

To advance towards a lasting peace, it is essential to end the occupation, halt the expansion of illegal settlements and return to the 1967 borders, as outlined in United Nations Security Council Resolution 242.

Furthermore, Resolution 2728 calling for an immediate ceasefire, and Resolution 1701 aiming at a lasting end to hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel, should be enforced as well. These actions are necessary to ensure a future of peace and justice for both Palestinians and Israelis. In recent statements, former High Representative of the EU Josep Borrell emphasised that these measures have already been agreed upon and should not be subject

to further debate. Israelis and Palestinians must be able to coexist in peace, security and prosperity.

All peoples and countries should live in peace, and that includes the Palestinians. We have seen them suffering so often and so extensively that we have become indifferent to it. In the social imagination of international public opinion, it seems that Palestinians are doomed to have to accept their fate and to continue suffering occupation and violence. But that does not have to be the case. We must break with the established global inertia and take meaningful steps, such as recognising the state of Palestine, as Spain and other countries have done this year.

Mediation talks are currently taking place in Cairo between the Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas with the objective of stabilising governance in Gaza after the war. Peace efforts must prevail and guide the path to follow. Otherwise, once again, we will have to look back in shame and remember that we did nothing.

*Hana Jalloul,
MEP, Secretary for International
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of Socialist International*





Much ado in Baku

by Stephen Minas

Some COPs make history – other COPs have history done to them. Kyoto in 1997 and Paris in 2015 stand out as history-makers. By contrast, the 29th meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP) to the UN Climate Convention in Baku, Azerbaijan, fits solidly into the latter category.

Unique historical circumstances produced a COP in Azerbaijan: a stand-off between the EU and Russia over which country should take Eastern Europe's turn at hosting the climate talks. Baku was confirmed only when neighboring Armenia dropped its objections 'as a sign of good gesture', announced as part of a package that included the mutual release of captured soldiers. A country hosting a COP bears heavy responsibilities. Its team must set aside the more familiar and easier role of advocating for national positions and facilitate consensus among almost 200 countries to build outcomes that bring the world closer to achieving international climate goals. Masterful French diplomacy made the Paris Agreement possible. Last year's UAE presidency also helped parties achieve milestone outcomes, notably on transitioning away from fossil fuels.

► *Azerbaijan's president lauded his country's fossil fuel deposits as a 'gift of god' and pioneered a novel approach to diplomacy by insulting some of his guests.*

The COP29 presidency team no doubt did their best, but the tone was set early by the

head of state. **Azerbaijan's president lauded his country's fossil fuel deposits as a 'gift of god' and pioneered a novel approach to diplomacy by insulting some of his guests.**

This caused the French ecological transition minister to cancel her mission to Baku (ministers negotiate the most prominent issues at COP during the second week). In an unrelated development which contributed to a general sense of the wheels falling off, Argentina's delegation, already in Baku, was suddenly withdrawn by order of its government.

The COP venue itself – a large stadium – was efficiently organised, as was transport via a fleet of electric buses. At the venue, participants were assisted by a large team of helpful and friendly volunteers. In an unusual but welcome break from standard protocols, solitary white cats could occasionally be seen prowling the corridors and meeting rooms with no less a sense of purpose than their human counterparts.

| TRUMP 2.0

COP29 was haunted by the spectre of the impending Trump administration. Donald Trump has pledged to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement, as he did in 2020. This time, a withdrawal would take only

one year to effect. His previous administration reneged on US climate finance commitments. Many climate advocates responded to the US election result by claiming that the clean energy transition is inevitable and cannot be reversed by Trump. Well, sure. But it would be a mistake to underestimate the headwinds that might be incoming from the executive government of the world's largest economy.

► *COP29 was haunted by the spectre of the impending Trump administration. Donald Trump has pledged to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement, as he did in 2020.*

At the weekend, with talks deep into extra time at Baku Olympic Stadium, US climate envoy John Podesta was mobbed by a press pack and pursued by climate activists hurling accusations of broken climate finance promises. One wondered whether these activists – quite rightly focused on holding the powerful to account – could not allow themselves a moment of restraint, in view of the good that the Biden interregnum did and of what is coming next.

| THE OUTCOMES

In these circumstances, COP29's outcomes were neither completely disastrous nor surprisingly good. The headline is the 'new collective quantified goal' for climate finance to replace the famous \$100 billion per year by 2020. **With sums over \$1 trillion predictably shot down, many developing nations staged a late walk-out but returned to the table to bargain in the shadow of Trump and other developments that would likely have made a deal tougher next year.** The outcome is "at least" \$300 billion per year by 2035 for developing countries, "with developed country Parties taking the lead". Alongside this is a call on "all actors" to scale up financing from "all public and private sources to at least" \$1.3 trillion per year by 2035, a process to explore how this might be done, and a decision to "pursue efforts to at least triple" funding from multilateral climate funds by 2030 (importantly, most of these funds operate under COP guidance).

Major questions hang over this outcome. How much the US might contribute towards this goal in the next four years is anybody's guess (the \$300 billion goal is under the Paris Agreement, from which the US is expected to withdraw). The refusal of non-traditional donors (China, plus rich countries like South Korea, Singapore, the UAE and others which were not included in the 1992 Convention's Annex I) to participate in a formal expansion of the donor base may be more or less significant, depending on whether actual climate finance flows from these countries to poorer nations are ramped up. The consequences of the agreement being adopted despite India's objections remain to be seen.



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If the finance goal outcome contains both positives and negatives, COP29's mitigation outcomes were exceptionally weak. No decision could be reached to follow up on last year's global stocktake, after some parties blocked references to climate ambition and energy transition. A decision on "just transition" was likewise blocked. One decision that did eventuate, on "mitigation ambition", is largely lacking in it. **As at previous COPs, parties took dozens of decisions at COP29 and the headline outcomes do not give a complete picture of what was achieved.** Among the positives, parties took decisions that were needed for the recently established fund for responding to loss and damage to do its work, and for the functioning and transparency of carbon crediting under the Paris Agreement.

| FROM BAKU TO BELÉM

Overall, the worst was avoided. Like the Copenhagen conference 15 years earlier, parties pulled back from a complete breakdown of the multilateral climate process. COP29's outcomes can and must be built upon. But the climate clock is ticking. As the baton passes to the government and people of Brazil for COP30 in Belém, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has

warned that "COP30 will be our last chance to avoid an irreversible rupture in the climate system". The mission before all nations is clear: to work with the Brazilian presidency to deliver a just, inclusive and ambitious COP.

This article is written in a personal capacity.

▶ *With sums over \$1 trillion predictably shot down, many developing nations staged a late walk-out but returned to the table to bargain in the shadow of Trump and other developments that would likely have made a deal tougher next year.*

*Stephen Minas,
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BOOK

A New Global Deal

Reforming world governance



Trump's election marks a deeply concerning moment for multilateralism and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Reforming global governance to strengthen the multilateral system is urgently needed to tackle today's pressing global challenges.

FEPS book '**A New Global Deal: Reforming World Governance**' makes key proposals on how to reform the multilateral system in crucial policy areas such as climate, social, digital, trade and industrial policy as well as on how to reform the global financial architecture and the UN's institutions. Furthermore, it includes practical solutions to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.

Authored by European progressive experts and policymakers, it has been presented worldwide: at the UN Summit of the Future (New York), as well as in Brazil, Kenya, Nigeria, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Chile and China.





SPECIAL COVERAGE

US ELECTIONS: MORE THAN ANGRY MEN

American voters have pushed the US political agenda towards domestic priorities. Europeans have been looking at this election as one that will have massive implications for EU affairs. Yet, Europe's concerns are clearly not the main issue for American citizens, and we need to brace for a period when the US redefines its role and strategies in global politics and economics.

Donald Trump's return to the White House and a Republican majority in both the House of Representatives and Senate spell danger not only for US democracy and domestic politics but also for its ripple effects in the EU. Trump's victory may further embolden and empower far-right movements in Europe and worldwide. The general anti-populist language that has dominated the mainstream discourse over the past decade has failed to contain and roll back these trends, and progressive forces – in both North America and Europe – will need a better strategy with a clearer economic and social focus.

Apparently, half the US electorate does not mind voting for a person and a leadership style that most in continental Europe would consider not just extravagant, but extreme. People wonder how strong the foundations of US democracy are and whether Washington will still be able to play a leading role in democratic developments worldwide. A transatlantic dialogue on such matters will be critically important.

The first Trump presidency unleashed various forms of economic warfare against Europe and today there is a high risk that transatlantic relations could become precarious again. For Europe, there should be no ambiguity about the importance of multilateralism as a general framework for international trade and investment relations, and for maintaining a good spirit of economic cooperation in the transatlantic space.



Whose side are you on? The role of workers in the next Democratic Party

by Jessica Shearer

An anxious and abandoned electorate delivered a landslide victory to Donald Trump. In the most polarised US election in modern history, decisive numbers of Democrats stayed home. Decades into trying to be the party of both Wall Street and working families, Democrats will have to fight their way back to relevance by making a choice between them.

Looking at an election map, you will see thousands of arrows pointing to the right. Each signifies how much closer voters moved to Trump in these elections. His victory was total. Trump made sweeping gains in red states, in battleground and blue states. He owned the electorate.

It feels like an eclipse of the sun. The political class will say this was a change election and Democrats were unlucky to be the incumbents. This answer shirks responsibility. This was not just voting for change. You do not vote for Donald Trump because you want something a bit different. This was a revolt against the neoliberal politics that are failing everyday people. Americans are experiencing a loss of security and a loss of hope that cuts across generations.

I think people came to this election asking: whose side are you on? And in failing to find anyone on theirs, they chose someone willing to fight the system itself. Others turned away from the system, with decisive numbers of Democrats choosing not to vote in the most polarised election of our lifetime.

Amongst Trump's supporters, there is certainly an overrepresentation of angry men. But not only. There are a whole lot of fired-up white people in there – men and women – voting very explicitly for white power. But not only. It is a broader dislocation. A crisis of meaning and purpose. One built of the impotence we feel in facing a future we can neither imagine nor control. Where what is left is a fight between the last and the second last. Trump is taking deep economic and social insecurity, stoking fear, and turning it into 'The Hunger Games'.

The alternative to weaponised division cannot be only a set of policy reforms designed to mitigate the worst of the market's failures. On a number of measures, the Biden administration did well, better than other post-war administrations. **Wages are higher. There are more jobs. There are better jobs. That is thanks to both the broader power given to unions and the sheer amount of funding for new public jobs.** There was a moment when Covid-19 turned us all into Social Democrats. We ensured eviction protection,

created massive public works programmes and attempted to raise living standards across the board. That moment passed. But we need to recognise that we are still a world in crisis.

For those who are getting by, it feels tenuous. For those who are not, it feels hopeless. We have returned to treating jobs like they are the trickle-down benefit of profitable business. We need instead to centre work and the workers who are the engine of that profit. And we have not even begun to address the question of meaningful work if corporations still get to decide what economy we are living in.

► *Amongst Trump's supporters, there is certainly an overrepresentation of angry men. But not only. There are a whole lot of fired-up white people in there – men and women – voting very explicitly for white power.*

- *It will require a fight and a realignment – a different American dream. You cannot be the party that serves wealth, profit and people.*



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In politics, we often ask how we demonstrate to voters that we are better on the economy. But what if we asked instead: what would it take to deliver a fair economy? It would take a plan. A plan that protects work and workers through the accelerating changes in the labour landscape, and the inequalities they generate. A plan that is not dependent on whether companies had a good quarter. A plan that reorganises the economy to substantively and steadily improve the overall quality of life of everyone – rather than the 12 per cent annual growth that only Wall Street has been enjoying.

It would have to be a plan with comprehensive social welfare – one that can support the soon-to-be half of the US workforce that does not have a traditional employer.

This includes gig workers, whose labour companies like Uber exploit while failing to provide even the modest protections a job must offer. A plan that includes freelancers and people with 'sometimes work' – a plan built to support civil rights and all those who do not and cannot work.

What stands between this moment and that plan is not an absence of resources, it is a fundamentally American ideology that holds that we should not interfere with 'the economy'. That embraces an American dream whose keystone is the personal accumulation of wealth. We trust market forces to keep families healthy, fed, rested and secure. But this ideology is not working. It cannot work. Markets and capital need our consumption, they need our labour. Our well-being is immaterial. What has been set in motion and where it will land is hard to fathom. We did not rise to the moment that could have prevented this, but we can rise to the one to come.

It will require a fight and a realignment – a different American dream. You cannot be the party that serves wealth, profit and people.

We came close enough to winning majorities for long enough that we forgot – or were too conflicted – to choose. But it is no longer just about winning an election. It is about building a society – a society that has the security to hope, a society not at war with each other, a society whose trust we will have to earn.

There is something very concrete that the European Socialist family can do at this moment: be Socialists. Show us that there is an alternative, and that there can be one. Highlight and strengthen the role of government in serving the people who create it. Recommit to or build anew the Social Democratic systems that put security and well-being at their centre. The American century has come to an ignominious end. What follows can be a better era, a multipolar world built on the foundations of Social Democracy. Or something more like barbarism.



*Jessica Shearer,
CEO of Social Changes and a
long-time advisor to Democratic
Party and European social
democratic political campaigns*



Learn to listen

by Neel Brown

US working-class voters have sent a clear message to Democrats. Running as a centrist and governing as a leftist is not acceptable. Will Democrats listen and learn?

There are many lessons to be learned from this most recent US election and many contributing factors for the Democratic loss: the communication ecosystems are thriving on the right; misinformation through social media platforms is rampant; there was a lack of vigour in pursuing accountability at the Department of Justice; and perhaps some minor but cumulatively important tactical missteps in a very well-run Democratic campaign. All of these issues and more led to a decisive loss for the Democratic Party.

► *There is a real danger that the Democratic Party will misunderstand the lesson and fail the test in future elections.*

The most important lesson, however, is the one that working-class voters are teaching us. **There is a real danger that the Democratic Party will misunderstand the lesson and fail the test in future elections.** We have already heard from very loud voices on the far left that Democrats were not left enough. Bernie Sanders has made his case for this perspective and is getting some traction. Working-class voters decisively voted for Trump, a man who

explicitly rejects almost everything that Senator Sanders stands for. Somehow, Sanders now argues that the Democratic Party has abandoned the working class by not giving them more of what they just voted against.

Joe Biden ran his 2020 campaign as a pragmatic, pro-worker, pro-energy, down-to-earth Democrat. Americans knew Senator Biden as a centrist Democrat who could work with Republicans and get things done. This was a welcome relief from a chaotic Trump administration. **Once elected, and with much praise from the left, Biden filled the ranks of the White House and the administration with a host of left-leaning, Elizabeth Warren-devotees.** This intellectual foundation coloured nearly every policy that flowed from the Biden administration.

If one wonders why the working class feels ignored by the Democratic Party to such a degree that they chose a convicted felon over a continuation of the status quo, consider this short list of high-profile policies from the Biden administration:

- *Student debt relief:* the Biden administration proudly gave out over \$400 billion in student loan debt relief to college-educated Americans. **Non-college working voters did not get cheques for tens of thousands of dollars.** They got a message

that those with college degrees matter more. There is much to say about the merits of this programme and the disastrous problem of ignoring the underlying issues that continue to inflate already expensive US college tuition, but there is no question about the message received by the working class.

- *Energy:* Biden ran as an advocate for an all-of-the-above US energy strategy, notably making one of his final campaign stops in October 2020 in Pennsylvania to promise that he would not ban fracking. Biden presided over four years of record US energy production, including enough liquified natural gas (LNG) exports to keep the lights on in Europe after Putin's invasion of Ukraine. He also passed the most sweeping and ambitious green energy policy in US history, committing billions of dollars for research, innovation and deployment. Instead of championing these victories, the Warren/Sanders faction of the administration enacted a pause on the build-out of future LNG export facilities as a reaction to a threat of an environmental sit-in protest. This pandering sent an ominous message to our allies, potentially exacerbated the global emissions from coal burning, and was a betrayal of the Pennsylvanians to whom Biden had made a promise.



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• *Immigration reform*: immigration has been a long-time concern for many Americans, and particularly working-class voters. The Biden administration failed to address this issue until the last six months of his tenure. The paralysis on this issue springs from the far left's refusal to acknowledge the problem at the border. The left's proposed solutions are seen by many Americans as an open-border policy – for example, Warren's proposal to decriminalise border crossings. Once there was a realisation that Democrats could not win the White House without addressing the border issue, a compromise bill was hammered out and nearly passed. **President Biden clearly showed that he could find a bipartisan solution through engagement and compromise with both parties. It was, unfortunately, too late.** The time to show seriousness on this issue was years ago, but the far left was unbending in its denial of the real issues of immigration. Working-class voters do not want an open-border policy, but they perceived the lack of a clear and coherent alternative to Biden's policy as being the Democratic position. They chose the only alternative on offer.

► *Democrats cannot run as centrists and then govern as leftists and hope to maintain any trust. Voters have decisively rejected that governing strategy. Democrats are not listening to working-class voters, not responding to their needs, and enacting policies that are overtly dismissive of their concerns.*

As the Democratic Party studies the lessons from this campaign, it is crucial that it takes the clearly delivered message from voters. **Democrats cannot run as centrists and then govern as leftists and hope to maintain any trust. Voters have decisively rejected that governing strategy. Democrats are not listening to working-class voters, not responding to their needs, and enacting policies that are overtly dismissive of their concerns.**

The Democratic Party must learn to listen. Working-class voters do not want a patronising, college-educated, urban-elite Democratic Party telling them that they just don't understand what they need. If that is the perceived offering from the Democrats, voters will, unfortunately, choose almost anyone else.



Neel Brown,
Managing Director of the
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in Washington, DC



Europe should brace for impact

by Hannah Tyler

When I woke up on 6 November, my phone was flooded with texts from family in Europe. Shock, fear, anxiety, dread – it was all reflected in the questions on my screen. What will happen to you? Will you be okay? And what does this mean for us, here in Europe? Though it is difficult to answer the last question with certainty, given that uncertainty is Trump's hallmark regarding foreign policy, one thing is certain: Europe should brace for impact.

In his first term, and in the intervening years since, **Donald Trump made it clear what a second Trump administration would mean for Europe, and the US-EU relationship: Europe is on its own**, and the transatlantic relationship as we know it will be consigned to the ash heap of history. He has said that Europe will largely be on its own when it comes to defence; he has expressed scepticism about continued US support for Ukraine; and he has promised to implement tariffs that will inflict pain on European manufacturers. NATO, too, is at risk. Though Trump cannot unilaterally withdraw from the alliance, he could 'quiet quit' and he has laid out concrete plans where the US takes a backseat to Europe when it comes to NATO. The consequences of a second Trump term are, of course, not limited to defence. The US will approach cooperation on all issues – including energy, climate, health and competition – differently.

European leaders said throughout Trump's first term that they needed to start taking on more responsibility for Europe's defence, and in some ways they did, but much of that progress slowed under a friendlier Biden administration. Under Biden, 'America

was back' – and the traditional transatlantic alliance with it. But under the second Trump administration, 'America First' is back – and Europe will have to adjust. The flood of congratulatory messages for Trump from European leaders shows that they have understood one fundamental truth to working with Trump: flattery is necessary and criticism will result in punishment for their nation. And even if Europe has to stand alone, European leaders understand that EU-US cooperation will have to remain (though it will not be on their terms).

► *Donald Trump made it clear what a second Trump administration would mean for Europe, and the US-EU relationship: Europe is on its own.*

Trump's pick for Secretary of State, Florida Senator **Marco Rubio, is, in most senses, a traditionalist Republican, a foreign policy**

hawk who fundamentally believes in international engagement. Though he has adapted his foreign policy views to be more 'Trumpian,' he will likely represent a fairly 'pragmatic' foreign policy vision for the US.

But ultimately, in issues of foreign and domestic policy, Trump will have the final say. He will sometimes listen to his advisers, and sometimes he will not, and there is no predictable pattern when it comes to either. He considers unpredictability his signature weapon – a difficult prospect for allies and partners who seek to work together with him and with the US. With Trump at the helm, the US are no longer a reliable partner.

The transatlantic relationship will not disappear under Trump. There are underpinnings deeper than the top of the ticket that will help maintain the relationship – on a state, local and civic engagement level, especially. And the ties that bind, pragmatically, will remain. Though Trump will always prioritise America, there will be concrete issues that will call for continued cooperation, globally and transatlantically.



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For better or for worse, Europe will have to learn to carry its own weight – quickly.

And Europe will have to take up the mantle on global issues that Trump will cast aside: climate, tech, AI and regulation. This will require a commitment to European solidarity – not a given – and working closely together at an EU level to compellingly represent forceful policy positions on these issues.

And ultimately, this is a warning for Europe and for future elections in Europe. Democrats will join the 'graveyard of incumbent – for the first time in 120 years, the incumbents in every one of the ten major countries that have held elections in 2024 have been punished by voters. 'Incumbency advantage' has been replaced by 'incumbency disadvantage'.

This election was firmly a 'post-truth' election: voters were moved more by their feelings and impressions than by facts.

European incumbent parties would do well to try to adjust to this new reality as quickly as possible, or they risk learning the same painful lessons that the Democrats here in America must grapple with for the next few years.

- ▶ *This election was firmly a 'post-truth' election – voters were moved more by their feelings and impressions than by facts.*



Hannah Tyler,
Program Officer,
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Trump and the world 2.0: personnel is loyalty, not policy

by Dan Herman

As the world braces for Trump's return to power, many are looking for signals about what to expect from a second Trump administration's foreign policy. While some have declared that Trump represents a new American push towards isolationism, his personnel choices so far, plus his first-term track record, indicate a more transactional and chaotic approach. Beyond Trump's loud and clear priorities of boosting tariffs and launching mass deportations of millions of undocumented immigrants, Trump's foreign policy may take any number of paths.

Since the election, Trump has rolled out a series of personnel announcements – cabinet secretaries, ambassadors, White House staff. So far, Trump has surrounded himself with appointees whose defining characteristic is personal loyalty to him. Many of his picks have been part of his inner circle since his first administration, as well as his fiercest defenders in Congress and on television. Trump has often complained about being stymied or betrayed by 'disloyal' former appointees or the 'deep state'. It is clear that he is more concerned with who will defend and cover for him rather than the qualifications they may bring to their roles.

While Trump's allies have championed governing agendas through initiatives like the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 and the America First Policy Institute, his national security and foreign policy picks are a hodgepodge with little ideological through-lines, outside the prerequisite of loyalty to Trump. He has drawn some of his picks from the traditional conservative coalition (such as Senator Marco Rubio for secretary of state

and Representative Mike Waltz for national security advisor), others are business associates and family friends (like Charles Kushner for ambassador to France and Steven Witkoff as Middle East envoy), and some are more radical and disruptive choices (like controversial former Representative Tulsi Gabbard, Fox News host Pete Hegseth, and intelligence advisor Kash Patel).

► *The mix of ideologies, experiences and agendas means that administration priorities for key policy areas may shift, depending on who has Trump's ear at any one time.*

This mix of ideologies, experiences and agendas means that administration priorities for key policy areas may shift, depending on who has Trump's ear at any one time. Trump's current personnel picks

offer some clues into how his administration may approach several key policy areas, including the Russia-Ukraine war, the Middle East and competition with China.

Trump has long criticised US involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war and for months, maneuvered to end US assistance to Ukraine. Trump's proposals for a negotiated settlement to end the war will likely involve Russia retaining land it currently occupies, rewarding Putin in the near term for this war of aggression. However, a potential Trump administration featuring Secretary of State Rubio, National Security Advisor Waltz, and retired general Keith Kellogg as special envoy for Russia and Ukraine could leave open the door for a long-term pathway for NATO membership or bi- or multi-lateral security arrangements that would bolster defence for remaining Ukrainian territory.

In the Middle East, appointments such as Waltz, Mike Huckabee for ambassador to Israel, and Elise Stefanik as permanent representative to the United Nations signal that a Trump administration will find ready-made



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allies among Netanyahu's right-wing coalition, while isolating the Palestinians and further eroding any hope for a two-state solution. Trump's nominees also suggest a more aggressive posture towards Iran, potentially pushing them to bring their nuclear weapons programme underground.

- ▶ *The Trump administration will view China as the United States' primary security and economic geopolitical challenge.*

The Trump administration will view China as the United States' primary security and economic geopolitical challenge. Trump's choices of China hawks such as Waltz and Rubio risk putting the United States and China on an increased path towards a new Cold War footing where Trump presses countries all over the

world to choose sides between the two major superpowers. But when countries are forced to choose, can a unilateralist America First foreign policy doctrine compete with a globally engaged and financially activist China?

Governance-by-loyalty is a fraught formula – career-wise and for policy. As seen during his first term and more recently with former Representative Matt Gaetz's aborted nomination for Attorney General (and Pete Hegseth's nomination for secretary of defence), many of Trump's nominees never actually take office, or are later fired when Trump deems them insufficiently loyal. **Trump wants to be viewed as successful and as the centre of the story. Strong, independent figures at agencies face dim prospects for success unless they commit to being a supporting character in Trump's great drama.** The career officials tasked with implementing policies and running government agencies will likely find themselves under significant pressure, hesitant to be seen as disloyal to their leadership or contradict White House messaging, even when it may conflict with

their agency's priorities. Anticipating and hedging against Trump's agenda is a short-term exercise when policies and personnel can shift with the political winds.

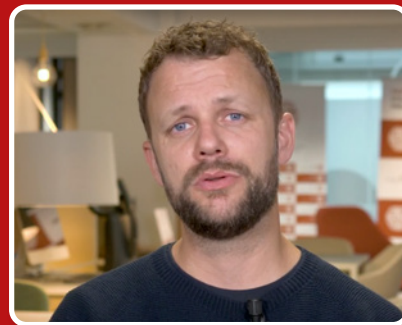
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Dan Herman,
Senior Director for Democratic
Accountability at the Center for
American Progress

VIDEO SERIES

YOUR FUTURE IS SOCIAL



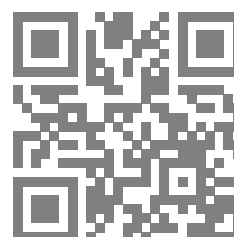
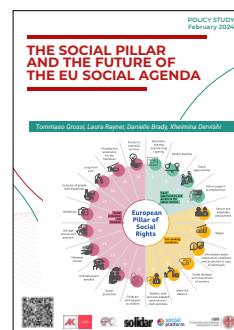
Our Union seriously risked benching social rights, as the first proposal by the Commission President von der Leyen referred to "people, skills and preparedness" without a clear and visible mandate to advance social rights in Europe. Thanks to the pressure of the social democrats and trade unions, finally the present Commission will benefit from the leadership of Roxana Mînzatu as Executive Vice President for **"Social Rights and Skills Quality Jobs and Preparedness"**.

Social rights and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) must be at the centre of the new EU agenda.

The **video series "A Pillar for our Rights"** is a reminder about **why the work on Social Europe must continue and what measures we would like to see** in this present legislature.

It is based on the **policy study "The Social Pillar and the Future of the EU Social Agenda"**, which provides an overview of the current challenges in implementing the EPSR and presents a shadow action plan with policy suggestions for EU initiatives on social employment policy.

Each video touches upon different aspects of our social rights: **quality jobs, working conditions, the just transition, innovation in employment, equal opportunities, and policymaking preparedness and coherence.**



FOCUS

THE FAR RIGHT DEMOLISHES THE WELFARE STATE

In many EU member states governed by the right and far right, citizens are suffering the continuous dismantling of public and social services, and the consistent demolishing of labour protections and rights. In complete opposition to the far right's pro-worker rhetoric, once in government, these right and far-right leaders tend to adopt an increasingly paternalistic, identity-based and corporatist approach. Such attacks on the welfare state contribute to further enriching the few while deepening inequalities for the many.

In this dossier, we propose three paradigmatic examples: Hungary under the hard control of Viktor Orbán, Giorgia Meloni's Italy, and Finland, which has its most right-wing government since the 1930s. In essence – and contrary to the far right's approach – welfare needs to be conceived of not only as ethically right, but also as a common good that produces empowerment and boosts economic development.

Orbán's centaur state

by Bálint Missetics

Viktor Orbán is well-known for his opposition to liberal democracy. He is also against the idea of the welfare state. For Hungary, this means rising inequalities and decaying public services.

It is not uncommon for European politicians to implement welfare state retrenchment. It is rare for a prime minister, however, to openly declare their opposition to the idea of the welfare state as such. Viktor Orbán announced, in 2012, that "instead of a Western-type of welfare state, which is not competitive, our programme is to establish a work-based society". What ensued was not the elimination of the welfare state, but its restructuring – the broad direction of which is aptly illustrated by French sociologist Loïc Wacquant's characterisation of the kind of state neoliberalism brings about: a *centaur state*, "liberal at the top and paternalistic at the bottom, which presents radically different faces at the two ends of the social hierarchy: a comely and caring visage toward the middle and upper classes, and a fearsome and frowning mug towards the lower class".

Whereas the Orbán regime has been statist in some policy areas regarding price controls and state ownership of utility companies, its fundamental distributive logic can be succinctly summarised: the more you have, the more you get. The decrease in employment protection and the curtailment of the right to strike have favoured capital over labour. The corporate tax rate in Hungary is the lowest in the whole EU. In comparison to many other European countries, income inequality is still

not very high. However, **Hungary saw the steepest increase in inequality among all member states between 2010 and 2023, as indicated by the Gini coefficient.**

► *Hungary saw the steepest increase in inequality among all member states between 2010 and 2023, as indicated by the Gini coefficient.*

The introduction of a flat personal income tax, alongside the elimination of low-income tax credits, has led to a remarkable surge in disposable income among the top 10 per cent, while the tax burden on those earning near the minimum wage has doubled on average. Consequently, the tax rate for the lowest earners is among the highest in Europe, while that of the highest earners is among the lowest. Considering both personal income tax and the highest value-added tax in Europe (at 27 per cent), households in the bottom 10 per cent of the income distribution pay a higher proportion of their incomes in taxes than the top 10 per cent.

Family and housing policies follow a similar distributive logic. **Although there are generous tax breaks, grants and subsidised credits for home purchases and renovation available to families with children, policies systematically provide more benefits to those with more secure employment, higher wages, more savings and more wealth than to those who are more in need.** The maximum duration of unemployment insurance has been reduced to just three months, the shortest in Europe. Minimum income protection – the extent to which the government protects its citizens from destitution – is the lowest in Hungary. By conventional measures, the prevalence of poverty is not particularly high, but poverty can be exceptionally deep: in terms of purchasing power parity, the actual income of those below 40 per cent of the median income is the lowest within the EU.

Historically, the Hungarian education system has been one of the most inequitable in Europe, failing to ensure equality of opportunity by mitigating the effects of students' socio-economic backgrounds. The subsequent Orbán governments bear responsibility for their inaction over the past 14 years of de facto political omnipotence and for their explicit approval of the ongoing segregation of Roma students. The same applies to public healthcare, whose problems also predate the emergence of the



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Orbán regime but have continued to worsen largely unaddressed. **Access to healthcare of acceptable quality has increasingly become contingent on purchasing power.** The stark contrast between the intolerable conditions in many public hospitals and the obscene enrichment of pro-government oligarchs or the extravagant investments in stadiums has underscored that the issue is not that the country is poor, but that essential public services are underfinanced.

The main goals behind this are easily discernible, as is the absence of some of the traditional goals of the post-1945 European welfare states. **The economic priorities of the Orbán regime have been to reach and sustain high levels of employment, and to ensure 'competitiveness' through a capital-friendly labour law and tax environment.** Welfare policy has followed two main goals. The first has been to ensure that the state incentivises labour market participation – a goal that has guided both welfare state retrenchments and some positive policy reforms, such as increases in the minimum wage and the expansion of preschool education coverage. The second has been a selective pro-natalist goal: to counteract

the long-term trend of population decline by boosting fertility rates – not universally, but specifically among middle- and upper-class households. Reducing inequalities – whether of opportunity or outcome – has simply never been a goal of the regime. This is not in line with the preferences of the Hungarian electorate. Comparative data consistently show a particularly strong expectation among Hungarians that the government should reduce differences in income levels.

Why have this discrepancy and the ever-more-obvious decay of public services not had a more significant impact on the popularity and electoral results of the governing party? I can only cover two parts of the explanation here. First, the government – through extensive, unscrupulous government propaganda – has been effective in centring politics on other issues, such as the purported threat posed by George Soros, 'Brussels', 'the migrants' and 'LGBT-propaganda'. Or, more recently, the government has been effective in convincing much of the electorate that the opposition (and again, 'Brussels') poses a threat to peace, and therefore the only way to avoid war is to vote for Fidesz.

- ▶ *Although there are generous tax breaks, grants and subsidised credits for home purchases and renovation available to families with children, policies systematically provide more benefits to those with more secure employment, higher wages, more savings and more wealth than to those who are more in need.*

Second, the available alternative has not been convincing because of the unfavourable track record of the hitherto dominant opposition parties and because **the liberal opposition has never consistently campaigned around material and distributive issues, but has mostly focused on corruption and abstract notions of 'Europe' and 'democracy' instead.** It remains to be seen what might transpire if an opposition were to emerge that is both willing to articulate and capable of credibly representing the widespread discontent with the dismal quality of public services, rising inequalities, and the material insecurity affecting broad segments of the population.



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How social dialogue can defeat authoritarianism in Italy

by Andrea Mornioli

A profound authoritarian dynamic is cutting through democracy in Italy and sapping it. The population is witnessing a cultural and political dismantling through a real reversal of public policies that, through the tax system, have stopped redistributing wealth for welfare. We need to restore a social dialogue so that common sense again starts to prevail on the idea that providing welfare and producing empowerment is not only ethically and civically right, but also decisive for economic development.

The signs are clear: democracies are increasingly in crisis. For Italy, this dynamic has made important inroads. The result of the choices and policies of many of the successive governments have, albeit with varying degrees of intensity, systematically debilitated labour protections and rights. These successive governments have fostered a real reversal of public policies, which, through the tax system, have stopped redistributing wealth on welfare, schooling and health. Furthermore, this dynamic has ended up dismantling one of the cornerstones of the Italian constitution — namely that of considering one of the primary responsibilities of the state to guarantee and protect the enforceability of rights. The process of focusing public services more on economic imperatives than on rights and care for the collective good has today reached the point where the mere public ownership of a service or provision no longer certifies its public function (guaranteeing its universality of access). The public seems to have bowed to the 'market' and individualist model in many contexts.

Public policies have been moving in this direction for years, but there is no doubt that the Italian government led by Giorgia Meloni has pushed this political and ideological framework further than any of its predecessors by defining a framework based on rejecting any universalist hypothesis, centring it rather on a corporatist, identity-based and paternalistic approach. This is particularly the case on welfare issues, first and foremost health. Moreover, **by rejecting all social dialogue, the current government is turning out to be overbearing and vicious towards the weak.** Indeed, the latter are increasingly poorly served by institutions and public actors, which are more attentive to the 'centres' than to the 'margins'. In recent years, people who have felt abandoned and unrecognised, and who are therefore angry and resentful of politics, have fallen for the allure of those who propose authoritarian turns and easy enemies at which to lash out.

Among the various areas where all basic services of universal welfare have been

corroded, the severe shrinkage suffered by the national health system is particularly stark in Italy. Policies favouring privatisation and aiming to offload many care tasks onto the family have dismantled the very idea of public care. Indeed, public intervention has shifted from a logic of inclusion, and a perspective of collective and public responsibility, to containment and institutionalisation. People are seen as receivers of benefits rather than subjects with a voice, co-decision-makers and co-producers of policies. The universalism of rights is being undermined by a return to welfare for a few. In addition, social work — which under normal conditions is a primary good for the community, and which implements the basic conditions for a life of dignity — is increasingly being devalued.

► *By rejecting all social dialogue, the current government is turning out to be overbearing and vicious towards the weak.*

- *Before the economic dismantling, a cultural and political dismantling had already been prepared and nurtured by an invasive narrative, often based on simplifications and instrumental representations of reality. This has changed the country's common sense, turning the poor into culprits for their condition, to the point of absurdity. The problem no longer seems to be poverty, but how to treat the poor.*



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Before the economic dismantling, a cultural and political dismantling had already been prepared and nurtured by an invasive narrative, often based on simplifications and instrumental representations of reality. This has changed the country's common sense, turning the poor into culprits for their condition, to the point of absurdity. The problem no longer seems to be poverty, but how to treat the poor. Hardship is criminalised, and the weak are losing humanity. They are no longer spoken about as individuals, but as negatively represented categories. This clears the way for indifference and resentment toward them. Inequality has become 'normal', and the private is always seen as better than the public. Merit is proposed only as the accumulation of wealth and not as the fruit of people's abilities and investments. Moreover, with the current discussion of the law on differentiated autonomy, the authoritarian drift has come to completion. This law widens the gaps that split the country (and that have been preventing its growth for years). It favours the privatisation of services and debases public intervention into a mere function of the

containment and institutionalisation of all the hardships and frailties that should not be left to market regulation or dumped on families.

- *Given the current situation, a radical change is urgent. A horizontal alliance needs to be built that supports this change, and that takes into account all the actors involved and the complexity of the contexts.*

Given the current situation, a radical change is urgent. A horizontal alliance needs to be built that supports this change, and that takes into account all the actors involved and the complexity of the contexts. In addition, welfare and policies to combat poverty and inequality need to be perceived as prerequisites for development and not the outcomes of it. Welfare is not a corollary of the policies that matter. It needs to be conceived by cutting across all areas of the economy and society at large.

Welfare therefore means working for the collective human development of the whole community. We consistently need to build an alternative narrative to the dominant one that is built around the idea that welfare can only be guaranteed through the removal and containment of ever larger masses of the excluded and marginalised. We need to make it clear that welfare and producing empowerment are not only ethically and civically right but also often cost-effective and decisive for economic development.



Andrea Momioli,
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Finland's far-right government is running down the welfare state

by Lauri Finér

Finland now has its most right-wing government since the 1930s – and this can clearly be seen in its economic policy. Massive cuts to social security and public service spending are undermining the welfare state, and the government's labour market reforms are weakening employees' negotiation power.

Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's right-wing government has been in power in Finland since spring 2023. Orpo's National Coalition Party (NCP) won the elections with 20.8 per cent of the vote and agreed to form a government with the populist right Finns Party that was just 0.7 percentage points behind. Together they formed a majority coalition government with the support of two smaller right-wing parties.

The government can be called extreme right-wing, as a similar coalition has not been seen since the 1930s when fascism gained influence in Finland. This extreme right-wing stance can clearly be seen in the current government's economic policy, which has been plain from the beginning: public spending on social security and public services is being cut dramatically. This has especially started to harm those on low income and in need of social services. However, the fiscal consolidation has affected everyone except the richest, who have even received tailored tax reductions.

These budget cuts do not involve small amounts. The government says it will consolidate public finances by €9 billion annually. This corresponds to about 10 per cent of the central government budget, or 3 per cent of Finland's gross domestic

product (GDP). For many low-income families, this means hundreds of euros less to live on each month, and the queues for public health services have begun to grow.

► *The government can be called extreme right-wing, as a similar coalition has not been seen since the 1930s when fascism gained influence in Finland.*

In reality however, the fiscal consolidation is significantly smaller – but still enormous – at approximately half of the €9 billion that was announced. The government exaggerates this figure with selective calculation methods. It has, among other things, re-classified about €1 billion of ordinary annual budget spending as 'investment programme' and ignored it in the calculations. This blurring is due to the fact that the government's narrative relies essentially on its claim to bring Finland's debt under control in the face of necessity.

The election campaigns of both main governing parties were built on debt scare-mongering and the claim that they would lower the public debt. Their core message was that the centre-left government of the Social Democratic Prime Minister Sanna Marin had made irresponsible economic policy. Yet the debt growth during Marin's government was mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, from which Finland came out among the best in the world in economic and health indicators. At the end of 2023, Finland's debt-to-GDP ratio was 75.8 per cent. This ratio has clearly risen, especially after the financial crisis, but it is still below the average in both the EU and the euro area. Finland's interest rate has also remained relatively low.

Despite these facts, debt scaremongering paid off and impacted the voters' decision in the elections of spring 2023. In the view of many analysts, it was a key reason for the election result. Both the NCP and the Finns Party promised significant spending cuts before the elections, but there were also differences in their economic programmes. Respecting their populist roots, the Finns Party did not present the means to implement the massive spending cuts it promised.

By contrast, the NCP proposed cuts to both social security and service spending.

The coalition government's economic programme therefore largely matches the goals of the NCP, while the Finns Party has broken many of the key promises it made before the elections. For example, Finns Party chair Riikka Purra, who later became finance minister, pledged her party would not accept any budget cuts that affected citizens on low income. Nor did the Finns Party election campaign programmes include proposals to cut spending on social and health services or education.

The government is also undermining the foundations of the Finnish welfare state in another way. **Until the 2023 elections, the Finns Party appealed to the working class. After the elections, however, it made a massive U-turn when drafting the government's labour market policy** because the government is now implementing more than 20 reforms that will weaken the negotiating power of employees and trade unions. This will, in many ways, break down the Finnish labour market policy model that has been in use since the second world war, where governments have negotiated all major reforms

in cooperation with the representatives of employees and employers. The labour unions have called the turn a scam as the current reforms were not in the Finns Party's election campaign programmes, nor, even, in the NCP's. In fact, they were copied directly from the programmes of employer associations.

► *The election campaigns of both main governing parties were built on debt scaremongering and the claim that they would turn the public debt into decline.*

It can be considered another broken promise that the government is not able to eliminate budget deficits despite the pledges of both the main government parties made before the elections. According to the latest forecasts, the central government debt will rise as much as it did during the previous Marin-government, but this time without a pandemic.

This is primarily because the government does not want to increase taxes on the rich, even though the highest-earning one per cent pay proportionally less taxes than lower-earning income groups. **The capital accumulated by the rich is taxed at lower rates than high salaries. The taxes of the richest were even slightly lowered this year.** Although the government decided in spring 2024 to increase certain taxes, these were primarily regressive ones, affecting low-income earners proportionally more. From the beginning of September, Finland's general value-added tax rate rose to 25.5 per cent, the second highest in the EU.

The total support for the governing parties, especially the Finns Party, has fallen somewhat since the elections. Yet they may recover before the 2027 parliamentary elections. Finns Party chair Purra has already stated that the harsh spending cuts must be continued after this government's term. The coming years will show whether the Finnish welfare state is on the verge of being totally scrapped. The development of the rule of law in Finland has also stalled during Orpo's government.

The left-wing opposition has plenty of work to do if it wishes to turn the tide. Hope for this should not be lost as the current government has never come close to the popularity of Marin's government. It is also worth remembering that the 2023 election result was tight. The Social Democrats fell short of victory by less than one percentage point, and the previous government's parties obtained nearly half of the votes. **Today the Social Democrats are leading the polls, with their new chair, Antti Lindtman, trying to keep ahead until the elections in 2027.**

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Lauri Finér,
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New Pact Implementation

Policy study series



The New Pact policy studies series is a **useful tool for navigating the ongoing debate on migration and understanding the challenges posed by the New Pact's implementation.**

Some EU leaders are tempted to imitate the Italian way and are pushing for the creation of return hubs outside the EU. The EU must refrain from these temptations. Outsourcing the management of migration is not an option.

The series – by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the European Policy Centre, – examines how the Pact should and will work to grasp its criticalities and analyse whether it will help overcome the shortcomings of previous migration management. It also offers concrete proposals to ensure the New Pact's effective implementation and the protection of vulnerable applicants.





DOSSIER

THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Europe has entered an advanced phase of the demographic transition: the shift from a society with high birth rates and high death rates to one where both are declining. These trends translate into an ageing population, profound changes in the social structures of European countries, and an imbalance between the working-age population and elderly people, which in turn affects the European pension and welfare systems.

Complementary to this is the situation on the African continent: a demographic boom, with a young working-age population that outnumbers employment opportunities.

The great challenge for the future is to address transition – in an inclusive and cohesive manner – allowing for a 'longevity society' where people can live longer and well. Some of the people-centred and rights-based measures that the European Union and the member states should adopt to face the otherwise inescapable decline are regulated and integrated migration, policies that address gender inequalities and youth empowerment.

Simplistic calls to encourage childbearing will never be enough, as they have little impact, and may significantly affect people's health and rights, as well as gender equality.



Europe's demographic challenge: policies for sustainable generational renewal

by Alessandro Rosina

European demography is characterised by an ageing population, driven not only by increased longevity but also (and mainly) by declining birth rates. This fuels significant imbalances between generations, leading to serious social and economic consequences. To address the demographic transition, it is essential to act on three interdependent fronts: promoting fertility, improving young people's and women's access to (and permanence in) the labour market and implementing integrated immigration policies.

The European population is entering a new phase of its demographic history, characterised by long-term decline and accelerated ageing. The dynamics of the demographic transition have led to increased longevity and declining birth rates, resulting in profound changes to the population structure. The reduction in mortality risks from birth to old age has brought the replacement level (the number of children required to replace parents) to around two. However, fertility rates have fallen below this level in most countries worldwide, leading to insufficient fertility to sustain generational replacement.

Europe, as the continent where the demographic transition first began, is now in the most advanced phase of this process. Currently, all European Union countries report fertility rates below two children per woman, though there is considerable variation across the continent. The persistent low birth rates are now also eroding

the population of reproductive age. This means that births are declining not only because fertility is below replacement level, but also because the number of potential parents is shrinking.

The European population is thus ageing due to both increased longevity, which raises the number of elderly people, and declining birth rates, which reduce the younger population.

This significantly changes the balance between generations: larger cohorts (born when birth rates were still relatively high) are moving into old age, while smaller cohorts (born when the total fertility rate dropped below two) are entering the prime working years.

The ageing population structure pushes birth rates further downwards (due to the shrinking number of people of childbearing age, as mentioned) and raises mortality rates (due to the growing proportion of elderly individuals). This shift causes the natural balance (births minus deaths) to move from positive to negative.

The EU population, just under 450 million at the beginning of 2024, has not yet begun to decline, despite the negative natural balance, only thanks to immigration and, more recently, the significant influx of refugees from Ukraine. **In the coming years and decades, the magnitude of population decline and generational imbalances will depend on how low fertility remains and how effectively immigration flows are managed and integrated.** In 2023, seven EU member states experienced population decline, where migration flows failed to offset the negative natural balance.

► *The European population is ageing due to both increased longevity, which raises the number of elderly people, and declining birth rates, which reduce the younger population.*

Building a 'longevity society', with the basis and conditions for living well and longer, is the primary demographic challenge of the 21st century. What makes the difference in positively addressing this challenge is the strength of the younger generations. If their demographic weight declines too much (a process known as 'dejuvenation'), it leads to unsustainable imbalances in the ratio between the elderly population and the working-age population. The ability of a country to generate well-being – by driving economic development and ensuring the sustainability of the social system (through the funding and functioning of the welfare system) – depends on both the quantitative and qualitative mechanisms that ensure an adequate generational renewal.

To try and prevent demographic imbalances from becoming unsustainable, it is necessary to act on three interdependent fronts.

The first is that of fertility. **The basic principle is to ensure that having a child does not significantly worsen economic conditions or complicate work-life balance. Acting in this direction does not automatically lead to a recovery in birth rates, but it does help reduce the gap between the desired and actual number of children.** Additionally, it promotes female participation in the labour market, reduces child poverty and generally enhances the potential for investing in children's growth and education, which positively impacts the quality of future generations. Conversely, failing to implement effective policies in this area will undoubtedly result in a continuous decline in births and an increase in gender, social and generational inequalities. Recent trends and experiences from various European countries indicate that birth rates tend to plummet to very low levels in the absence of adequate policies, that no single measure consistently works everywhere and that the needs and expectations of families change. This, in turn, requires continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of the implemented measures and a willingness for experimentation on how to improve them.



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The second line is that of a more efficient use of the working-age population through improved entry and empowerment of young people and women in the labour market. This requires increased investment in training, school-to-work transitions and work-life balance. In addition to the immediate effects of increased employment and productivity, it also has repercussions on the first line of action, as it better positions young people and women to achieve their life and family goals. Furthermore, greater, more sustained and solid participation in the labour market allows individuals to look towards their older years with more confidence and security.

The third line is that of immigration. Even with a potential resurgence in birth rates (with which we are struggling across Europe), the positive effects on the labour market would not be observed for 20 years or more. On one hand, there is an immediate need to address the requirements of companies and organisations to find workers in many sectors. On the other, **regular and integrated immigration also helps counteract the reduction in the reproductive-age population, thereby contributing – together with the policies of the first line – to an increase in birth rates.**

Moreover, this positively complements the second line of action: if adequate policies for young people and women are lacking, young

and immigrant women will be even more affected, leading to negative consequences for their contribution to overall fertility trends. In other words, immigration, family policies and measures to address generational and gender disparities must be integrated, with a systemic vision, and regarded as a central part of economic and social development policies. All of this is also consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (no poverty, quality education, gender equality, decent work and reduced social inequalities, among others) and with the strengthening of full citizenship rights. These include the right not to have children, which must truly be guaranteed as a free choice, rather than as a renunciation due to unfavourable conditions, ensuring a positive balance with other personal goals such as professional achievement and social well-being.

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Gender equality can help shape the demographic and economic outlook

by Meena Fernandes and Cecilia Navarra

Policies that promote gender equality – investing in the professional care work sector, boosting recognition of unpaid care work and ensuring fair wages – can help address demographic trends in a manner that supports a more competitive, human-centred and cohesive society.

The new EU political mandate has started with a strong focus on boosting the EU's competitiveness. This orientation responds to the EU's gradual economic decline over the past decades, which has been exacerbated by global crises, including the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and the recent wave of inflation.

Many proposals to boost the EU's competitiveness tend to present the EU's demographics as 'fixed', rather than as an element that could be harnessed and shaped by policymakers. However, the EU's demographic composition and its outlook are relevant and should be taken into account in policy decisions. This is because **competitiveness could be viewed more broadly – not just as the production of more economic output, but also of more well-being**. A more holistic conception of competitiveness – one that takes demographics into account – could be more sustainable and support the EU in meeting its goals more fully (for example, the European Pillar of Social Rights and climate neutrality by 2050).

The Draghi report on competitiveness mentions a shrinking labour force and "deep gender gaps in some occupations". Promoting gender equality could address both challenges to some extent, but the report barely mentions this. **Addressing gender inequality could not only go hand in hand with economic growth and competitiveness but could also boost them.**

► *Many proposals to boost the EU's competitiveness tend to present the EU's demographics as 'fixed', rather than as an element that could be harnessed and shaped by policymakers.*

Women represent about half of society's human capital potential, yet they are far less engaged in the labour market and more vulnerable to

poverty and violence. Research has shown that the lower labour market participation of women is linked to the lack of access to affordable and quality care services, and to an unequal distribution of caretaking tasks within households. There is a 'vicious cycle' that has a consequence for growth and competitiveness especially in light of the ageing population and the increasing dependency ratio.

Policies that promote gender equality could be a stabilising force for demographic trends and also promote the EU's competitiveness. What kind of policies could be considered?

The first category of policies to be considered are those that promote the quality, accessibility and improvement of working conditions in the professional care sector, where the workforce is predominantly (90 per cent) female. Professional care workers include child-care workers, teaching assistants and personal care workers providing long-term care. The EU could support investment in this sector and also improve the monitoring of care facilities.

Such actions could lead to better working conditions, salaries and career progression in the sector, which is currently quite poor and unattractive. In addition, the mandate of the European Labour Authority could be expanded to include occupational health and safety: a key issue for care workers. As many professional care workers are migrants from other EU countries or from third countries, EU policies to ensure their rights to good working conditions could complement and reinforce measures in the area of gender equality to support a fairer society, a sounder economy and a more balanced demographic outlook.

While this first category of policies would also support the possibility for households to have access to professional care, which is of growing importance in the context of an ageing population, **the second category of policies to be considered for greater promotion of gender equality would be those that boost the recognition of unpaid care work provided within households.** Policies could support a twofold approach: favouring a more balanced division of care tasks within households and guaranteeing that caring for a dependent does not have a negative impact on one's job security. Building on the Work-Life Balance Directive, the EU could do more to ensure the job security of carers (most often women) who take time off to care for a family member in need. A system of pension credits could also be considered to compensate carers and reduce the risk of elderly poverty.

The third category of policies to be considered concerns the assurance of fair wages.

The Pay Transparency Directive is a step in this direction. To go further, more needs to be done to ensure that jobs that require similar qualifications and skill levels offer comparable wages regardless of whether the job is predominantly done by men or women. Moreover, the setting of fair minimum wages could also reduce the difference in earnings between men and women, since the majority of minimum wage earners in the EU are women.

These three sets of policies could reduce the level of precarious work, which disproportionately affects women in the EU. Such a reduction could then lead to greater engagement of women in the labour market. **We estimate that the EU labour market could be about 20 per cent greater if women were as engaged in the labour market as men.**

Such an increase could counteract the projected decline in the working-age population and also reduce the level of elderly poverty, which currently affects women disproportionately due to the inequality of income over the lifespan. EU policies to tackle gender inequalities in the labour market could generate up to an estimated €153 billion annually.

Women's improved labour market engagement could also potentially affect fertility rates. Recent research from Europe has found that precarious work harms fertility, which has strengthened over time.

In terms of economic output and productivity, the EU is less competitive than the United States and increasingly challenged by emerging economies, in particular China. However, in terms of mental health, which is known to affect workplace engagement, the US fares poorly – an estimated one in four have a mental health diagnosis – far higher than many European countries. An analysis of survey data in the US finds that women who are less happy are less likely to report intentions of having another child.

► *We estimate that the EU's labour market could be about 20 per cent greater if women were as engaged in the labour market as men.*

Demographic trends are an important reference and should be considered by policymakers. Policies that promote gender equality – investing in the professional care work sector, boosting recognition of unpaid care work and ensuring fair wages – can help address demographic trends in a manner that supports a more competitive, human-centred and cohesive society.

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Harnessing Africa's demographic trend

by Jakkie Cilliers and Tumi Mkhize

When it comes to demographics, the stories of Europe and Africa are like night and day – vastly different but complementary. Like supply and demand, one is not possible without the other. The EU's total population is declining (from 444 million in 2024, probably to around 408 million in 2050), meaning that many towns and cities, particularly in more rural areas, are slowly depopulating. Demand for housing in rural areas is declining, with schools having to close, and hospitals having to shut down due to the absence of a large enough user base. By contrast, Africa is in the midst of a demographic boom. The continent's population is expected to double by 2050 to 2.5 billion, and the demand for education and health facilities is increasing exponentially each year.

While the portion of working-age persons in Europe is declining, that in Africa will increase from 57 per cent in 2024 to 62 per cent in 2050. Actual numbers are much larger – an increase from 854 million to 1.6 billion people aged 15 to 64 years. This presents Africa with a potential demographic dividend, where the working-age population outnumbers dependents, thus creating conditions conducive to economic growth. If harnessed effectively, this worker bulge could offer significant potential for Africa's development – but the provision of education, healthcare and jobs lags behind. The African Development Bank estimates that 10-12 million young people enter the labour market yearly, but only 3 million formal jobs are created. This means **millions of young Africans are at risk of being unemployed or underemployed, which can fuel economic frustrations, as**

witnessed in the youth protests in July 2024 that demanded service delivery and an end to corruption in Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria. The result of this, and other factors, is the large-scale movement of people from one African country to another in search of opportunity and substance.

► *If harnessed effectively, this worker bulge could offer significant potential for Africa's development – but the provision of education, healthcare and jobs lags behind.*

By contrast, **Europe's ageing population raises concerns about labour shortages. Europe's median age is expected to rise from a little over 45 years today to almost 50 by 2050 – that is the age at which half the population is younger and the other half older than the median.** The portion of the EU population considered to be of working age is declining (from 63 per cent of the total population today to 56 per cent by 2050), while the portion in the age bracket of 65 years and above is growing – from 99 million in 2024 to 125 million in 2050.

With fewer workers relative to pensioners, the dependency ratio (the ratio of non-working dependents to the working population) will rise. A higher dependency ratio means a larger proportion of the population is economically dependent, which will strain social welfare



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systems and reduce economic growth. The economic implications of this are quite severe: as more people retire, fewer taxes will be collected, while government health spending on more expensive non-communicable diseases and on pensions will increase.

► *Europe's ageing population raises concerns about labour shortages. Europe's median age is expected to rise from a little over 45 years today to almost 50 by 2050 – that is the age at which half the population is younger and the other half older than the median.*

In contrast to Africa's large labour surplus, **Europe will experience significant shortages in the coming decades, with sectors such as healthcare and many lower-skilled manufacturing and service sectors struggling to find sufficient workers.** According to Business Europe, the European Union will experience a worker shortfall of approximately 35 million by 2050. Artificial intelligence can do many things,

but it cannot care for the elderly, sweep streets or undertake the myriad of menial jobs that Europeans cannot (sometimes will not) do.

Urbanisation is another notable trend shaping Africa's future. The continent is urbanising rapidly, with its urban population growth being the fastest globally. Each year, urban Africa grows by an estimated 20 million people. By 2030, that number will be close to 25 million annually. By then, Africa will host six of the world's 41 megacities: Cairo, Lagos, Kinshasa, Johannesburg, Luanda and Dar-es-Salaam will have more than 10 million inhabitants each, and 17 African cities will have a population of more than five million each. Urbanisation can drive economic growth and development but it also challenges infrastructure, housing, healthcare and social services. **If Africa's cities cannot accommodate the influx of people, the benefits of urbanisation could be offset by congestion, inequality and social unrest.**

Time will tell how the demand for labour in the EU will level out with Africa's surplus – but if the past is an indication, the future is likely to see them complement one another, just as day complements night.

► *Urbanisation is another notable trend shaping Africa's future. Urbanisation can drive economic growth and development but it also challenges infrastructure, housing, healthcare and social services.*



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BOOK

A new Gender Equality Contract for Europe

Feminism and progressive politics



As the European Commission enters its new term and as concerns have been high on the lack of ambition on equality policy, this publication offers a timely reflection on the need for a new gender contract for Europe.

Read the new open-access book "A New Gender Equality Contract for Europe", which argues why gender equality should become a unifying force towards more egalitarian, solidaristic and caring societies.

The topics include **education, reproductive health, labour, care, cultural rights, democracy, climate, and Feminist Foreign Policy**. Featuring gender experts from diverse disciplines and backgrounds across Europe, the book connects feminist academic intelligence with hands-on policymaking.

By the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) in cooperation with Fondation Jean-Jaurès, published by Palgrave Macmillan.



A hand is shown holding a 100 Euro banknote. A white star sticker is placed on the top left of the note. The background is a solid purple color.

DOSSIER

BLUNT WEAPONS? EUROPE'S FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

The EU member states' record on the rule of law is diverse. On the European continent, some of the most virtuous countries in the world cohabit with states that traditionally struggle with systemic corruption. They also cohabit with governments that wittingly challenge, if not dismantle, the rule of law.

Corruption is not just a question of fighting crime. Societies and economies, citizens and companies, can only thrive in an environment where everybody is equal before the law and where the law is certain.

In particular, transparency and accountability are essential for the correct functioning of the European single market – they are therefore also essential for boosting Europe's competitiveness.

Against this background, the European Union is trying to equip itself with tools to fight corruption. In 2023, the first von der Leyen Commission presented a proposal for a directive that aims to strengthen the capacity of the EU member states to fight corruption. Are the instruments that have been devised up to the challenge?



Corruption and anti-corruption in Europe: trends and prospects

by Enrico Carloni

Corruption is an ever-present problem and a persistent challenge in Europe. In addition, awareness of its negative and systemic effects is increasingly widespread. It undermines democratic institutions, economic stability, public trust and the ability to pursue environmental policy and climate change mitigation objectives, even threatening European security. Moreover, it compromises the values of the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and human rights, potentially becoming a tool for capturing democratic institutions by economic interests, foreign powers or autocratic regimes.

This growing awareness has not yet been matched by consolidated European action, although the approval of the European anti-corruption directive represents a pivotal moment. Corruption is a complex phenomenon: the term functions as an umbrella concept encompassing various forms of illicit conduct by public officials (bureaucrats and politicians) who betray public interest to favour private ones, obtaining personal benefits. This notion extends beyond bribery to include other manifestations such as extortion, embezzlement, influence peddling, clientelism, abuse of power, conflicts of interest and the capture of decision-makers by pressure groups.

Corruption affects individual member states and the functioning of European institutions, where transparency and accountability are essential for maintaining legitimacy and trust. **The problem is further amplified by European procedures, which are often implemented through the 'indirect' administration of member states.** Incidents such

as the misuse of European funds or fraudulent activities related to public procurement (for example in the NextGenerationEU programme) highlight the vulnerability of EU financial systems to corruption. Simultaneously, the European Union, as a prominent global regulatory actor and a hub for regulating European markets, faces significant interest pressures that may result in tolerated forms of public decision-making influence.

► *The problem is further amplified by European procedures, which are often implemented through the 'indirect' administration of member states.*

Corruption thus challenges both European and national institutions of member states. This dual perspective is evident in the 'package' of interventions adopted at the European level

in 2023, which includes the joint communication on anti-corruption policies for and within the Union and the proposed anti-corruption directive targeted at member states (currently pending adoption).

This second aspect warrants particular attention. **Faced with countries increasingly influenced by populist politics and less committed to the principles of the rule of law, a more incisive European role in shaping national administrations and institutions is essential.** The pursuit of greater integrity and transparency is undoubtedly in the Union's interest, but it faces significant obstacles. These include a fragmented European policy and, above all, the lack of adequate European competencies concerning the construction of national administrative systems. Conversely, member states resist a more prominent role for European rules over their public administrations. Consequently, common anti-corruption regulations, where present, are often sectoral or fragmented and inadequate, stemming from interventions justified by internal

market competencies. Developing more coherent and organic approaches is relegated to soft regulation mechanisms and governance processes that only partially succeed in influencing member states.

While European rules and policies increasingly exhibit uniform characteristics, the capacity and integrity of national administrations remain highly differentiated. Indices such as Transparency International's *Corruption Perception Index* and the University of Gothenburg's *Quality of Government Index* reveal that some member states rank among the least corrupt globally, while others struggle with systemic corruption.

Although numerous member states (or those preparing to join) have established organic systems to prevent and combat corruption, these require strengthening and support through Union initiatives. Thus far, European action has been implemented through various tools which are significant but overall inadequate. For instance, the European Commission's *Annual Rule of Law Report* evaluates the situation in all member states, including specific chapters on anti-corruption measures. This mechanism fosters dialogue and creates peer pressure to address identified shortcomings, but it often lends itself to delaying and evasive strategies, relying primarily on data collected by national institutions.

The introduction of a conditionality mechanism tied to the rule of law links the disbursement of EU funds to compliance with rule-of-law principles. This instrument aims to prevent fund misuse by withholding financial support to non-compliant member states. However, **doubts persist regarding the effectiveness of such measures, except in the case of candidate countries for Union accession, where these evaluations carry more binding implications.**

In this context, the European Commission's 2023 proposal for a directive aims to strengthen the fight against corruption in the EU by introducing binding rules for member states on preventing, investigating and repressing corruption. The directive emphasises harmonising definitions



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of corruption-related crimes and corresponding sanctions, ensuring greater consistency across member states. Furthermore, it lays the groundwork for strengthening corruption prevention systems by developing principles and mechanisms already present in the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).

Starting from the Commission's proposal, the two co-legislators, Parliament and Council, approved different texts, which are the result of opposing visions. While the text adopted by Parliament greatly enriches the original proposal, especially as regards prevention measures, the text proposed by the Council is more modest in innovative content and includes significant concessions to member state requests (for example making the criminalisation of abuse of office optional in order to accommodate Italy, where the crime was recently abolished). The evolution of the European anti-corruption framework thus hinges on defining a final text (for which the start of the trilogue is awaited), which is hoped to align closely with the Parliament's version, but which primarily depends on the directive's adoption to overcome the current impasse.

In facing global challenges, combating corruption assumes strategic importance for European democracy, yet significant uncertainties persist in the actions of European institutions, constrained by governmental components and political resistance. The hope is that Europe, particularly the Commission, will overcome these obstacles and rise to the challenges of this critical historical moment. It needs to do this with the awareness that the challenge of corruption must be taken up not only and not so much as a question of criminal policy, but as an issue that calls into question the quality of administrations of the member states, and the integrity and transparency of their institutions as a matter of European interest.



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How the new Commission should improve the rule of law report

by Julian Plottka and York Albrecht

In her mission letter, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has tasked the Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, Henna Virkkunen, with strengthening the Commission's approach to the rule of law. This step results from continuous agenda-setting efforts by members of the European Parliament and interest groups – especially from the business community – to link challenges concerning national taxation policies and investment security with the rule of law (RoL) and the single market. As a first step, the European Commission will add a single market dimension to the RoL report "to address rule of law issues affecting companies, especially SMEs, operating across borders" from 2025 onwards.

To enhance the report's impact and improve the RoL situation in all member states, the Commission's assessment of the new single market dimension must be well-designed and clearly reveal existing deficiencies. However, the report will only make a difference if the new Commission improves its methodology and actively involves stakeholders and civil society in its research process. Furthermore, creating transparency is only the first step in facing the current challenges. The monitoring of member states' progress in implementing the Commission recommendations must be improved and conditionality should be established by linking the report to other RoL instruments.

ADDING A NEW SINGLE MARKET DIMENSION

RoL deficiencies in the EU member states have become a serious threat to the functioning of the single market. Employers and employees share a common interest in properly implementing the RoL in this area as autocratic rulers exploit illiberal practices to their advantage. This includes clientelism and cronyism, the expansion of executive powers to interfere with markets without parliamentary or judicial oversight and arbitrary legislation, as a recent study of the Institut für Europäische Politik shows.

Such practices violate formal and procedural requirements of the RoL which businesses rely on in the single market. Distorted markets then become a pillar of illiberal regimes and drive democratic regression.

To break this vicious cycle, the report should, first, clearly outline the importance of a functioning rule of law to economic actors. In the past, such debates mostly concerned civil society while **businesses remained silent about democratic backsliding to not endanger substantial tax cuts or preferential treatment by illiberal governments.** A lack of judicial independence and access to justice,



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discrimination against foreign investors, or systematic non-enforcement of national or EU law are threats to companies and investors. Making the consequences of RoL deficiencies in the single market transparent will win trade associations as new allies in the fight against democratic regression.

Second, the report should analyse how national governments use economic governance for illiberal practices that undermine the EU's legal order. Here, the RoL report should establish a direct link to the European semester, in which the Commission can also address RoL issues. National competition authorities have a pivotal role in guaranteeing the functioning of the single market. The lack of sufficient independence of these oversight bodies, which "protect citizens' quasi-constitutional economic rights", is a key concern of the RoL in the single market.

Third, the report should therefore assess their structural independence and make concrete reform recommendations if necessary. As with

judicial systems, cooperation and trust in the independence of these authorities are vital for the functioning of cross-border investment and trade in the EU.

► *Rule of law deficiencies in the EU member states have become a serious threat to the functioning of the single market. Employers and employees share a common interest in properly implementing the rule of law in this area as autocratic rulers exploit illiberal practices to their advantage.*

Fourth, one of the most pressing issues for companies is the de facto discrimination of foreign investors that exists in some member states. Addressing such discrimination is

difficult, as many legislative acts are carefully designed not to violate European competition law, while clearly distorting market fairness. For instance, surplus taxes against 'multinationals' in Hungary may comply with EU law but are a clear signal that some foreign companies are not welcome in Hungary. **The report should also cover cases of discriminatory practice in line with European law but against the spirit of the single market.**

Nevertheless, the area of media freedom and plurality clearly shows that the guarantee of economic freedoms is not a sufficient approach to secure the RoL in Europe. Although fair competition in the media market is necessary, it is not in itself sufficient to guarantee the freedom of expression and information. Media market concentration leading to monopolies, which are in some countries politically close to governments, seriously threaten the RoL. Currently, the report does not sufficiently reflect these political threats to media pluralism and needs it to take them more into account.



IMPROVING THE REPORT'S METHODOLOGY

To maximise the impact of the new single market dimension and the RoL report's other chapters, the Commission should strive to further improve the report's methodology. That the inclusion of the single market dimension results from political pressure from investors and trade associations that are dissatisfied with the lack of investment security and regulatory reliability in some (mostly Central Eastern European) states shows how important expertise from the ground is. Therefore, **the Commission should engage even more with stakeholders and civil society organisations (CSOs), including business associations and labour unions.** Indeed, the European Economic and Social Committee is currently working on detailed recommendations to improve the engagement of CSOs in the RoL report.

- ▶ *The report should also cover cases of discriminatory practice in line with European law but against the spirit of the single market.*

In addition to improving the research methodology, the Commission should improve the rather technical presentation of its findings. Currently, civil society organisations struggle to translate the report's key points into digestible language. The European Social Scoreboard and the Single Market Scoreboard are good examples of how to present comparative analyses. The Commission should therefore develop the EU Justice Scoreboard into a fully-fledged rule of law monitor that presents the trends in the EU visually.

MAXIMISING THE REPORT'S IMPACT

Simplifying the presentation of the report's findings is just the first step in maximising the impact of the report on the RoL situation in the member states. More important is the clarity of the Commission's recommendations to national governments.

The Commission should formulate precise reform recommendations, including benchmarks and deadlines, and it should monitor their implementation in the new rule of law monitor in the next report. While transparency on a lack of progress on reform helps CSOs push for reforms in the member states, the EU needs to have stronger instruments, if available. For cases where there is reluctance to reform, the other further strengthened instruments of the EU rule of law toolbox have to be linked to the report to enable the Commission to make reform conditional. Namely, the report's findings should be linked better to the country-specific recommendations of the European Semester as well as the conditionality regime to protect the Union's financial interests, including the Common Provisions Regulation and the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

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INTERVIEW



Migration: It is time for a paradigm shift!

Interview with Otilia Anna Maunganidze
by Ainara Bascuñana

Otilia Anna Maunganidze is a lawyer and head of special projects in the office of the Executive Director at the Institute of Security Studies in South Africa. She is also a member of the Progressive Migration Group established by FEPS. Here she discusses the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum from the viewpoint of African countries and stresses the need to abandon the current toxic narratives that portray migration as a threat when it can be a major driver of development and prosperity.

Ainara Bascuñana: This year, the EU member states agreed on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. After years of complicated negotiations, it was adopted in June. What is your stance on this new European legislation? Has the viewpoint of African countries been taken into consideration? And what will be the consequences of its implementation for the African countries?

Otilia Anna Maunganidze: The New Pact is the instrument that will inform how the EU as a whole and the individual EU member states deal with the question of migration. You rightly alluded to the fact that it took a long time for them to get to this New Pact. And part of it concerns the fact that migration is often a very emotional topic. It's one that's been quite politicised also within the European discourse. But it's one where parties don't necessarily agree. In their process, they had to find places where minds meet.

So, where's the problem with that? The problem is that the one particular area that basically takes centre stage in the New Pact is this focus on irregular migration. Irregular migrants are people who move across international borders either because they have been forced out of their countries due to conflict, war or climate change – or they move voluntarily but do not do so with a visa or even with a passport. So **the New Pact, in the way that it's framed – the need to secure Europe's borders, the need for more efficient ways of dealing with asylum procedures, or even around migration regulation – is focused on an estimated 5 per cent.** It's focused on the individuals who do not follow the regular channels. This approach overshadows the full migration scheme. What the New Pact ignores is that Africa is not only a continent of departure or transit, but also a continent of destination itself. It ignores the fact that some of the

issues that Europe has to contend with are issues that African countries are already dealing with and from which Europe could have learned a little bit more. But importantly, it also takes away this idea of a sovereign continent, which is Europe's neighbour to the South, by, for example, pushing Europe's borders beyond Europe into North Africa and the Sahel.

AB: A third of the world's refugee population is hosted by African countries. Most African migration happens inside Africa and not from Africa. What are the lessons that Europe could learn from Africa?

OAM: 80 per cent of people that voluntarily move, or African people that voluntarily move, do so within the African continent. They prefer to move to neighbouring countries, and



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there are many reasons for that: cultural ties, linguistic ties, proximity to home. The ability to be able to go back home when you want to really informs people's decisions to move.

A second category of people are those that are forcibly displaced. These are people who, either because of ongoing situations of violence, conflict, or forms of persecution, have no choice but to leave their homes. If they could, they would have stayed. We see this, for example, in the ongoing conflict in Sudan, or in countries in the Lake Chad Basin that have been impacted by violent extremism, where people are forced out of their homes and seek refuge elsewhere.

Where do most of these people go? They go to their neighbouring countries. Countries like Uganda and Ethiopia host way more refugees than several European countries combined. Ethiopia, for example, which has its own internal conflict, must deal with refugee flows coming from South Sudan and Sudan, as well as Somalia. Neighbouring Kenya, likewise, has a number of refugees, including from Ethiopia. And this is the case also for Uganda. But this is

not unique to the Horn of Africa. In Southern Africa, we find countries like South Africa and Zambia hosting many refugees coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo and from Burundi.

Why am I going through the range of countries that are dealing with refugee flows? Precisely because they have had to deal with hosting refugees with far fewer resources, with far less infrastructure to do so, and having essentially to make a plan. So, when, for example, Europe's policy position is to say, 'we are overwhelmed by the number of refugees', my immediate response is always just on the numbers alone – before you go into the very specifics of individual conditions. Countries like Uganda and Ethiopia are hosting more refugees. They're having to process asylum seekers much quicker so that these countries can ensure that the kinds of tensions we see between host communities and those that they are receiving do not flare up. **In Uganda, just to give you an example, asylum seekers and refugees are granted the right to farm because otherwise the government would have to provide for their support.** In this way,

governments prevent objections about the fact that refugees take advantage of the countries' limited resources and services. This is a lesson that Europe could learn. Another lesson concerns proximity. Border countries are the ones that receive most refugees. In Africa, that would be Uganda, again, for the South Sudanese. However, you can find South Sudanese as far as Zambia and South Africa in the spirit of responsibility sharing.

***AB:** Let me ask you about the narrative because, unfortunately, the European political debate is currently dominated by this toxic, very negative narrative around migration. And sometimes this narrative is based completely on misinformation or even lies. As an external viewer of these developments, what is your perception of the rise of the far right and the widespread diffusion of this toxic narrative?*

OAM: There's a global wave shifting towards the right or even towards the far right, which in many ways is quite unfortunate. Why does migration find itself in the storm?



It's because migration is something you can put a face to. At the centre of the discussion is the criminalisation of people on the move, of migration itself as a concept, because people can then say, 'if it weren't for the migrants, I would have a job', 'if it weren't for the migrants, I would be able to access a hospital without queuing', or 'my taxes would be better distributed' – because you can blame individuals that, in your mind, can be gotten rid of. Fundamentally, it is a competition for resources. Also, this negative narrative becomes popular in communities because a lot of the messaging is around identity. It's about saying we are a particular group of people, and when we have people coming from other regions, this impacts the integrity of our identity. But Europe is a continent that is built on migration. In fact, it's a continent that is built on internal conquest. The way in which statehood has been shaped in Europe is based on that as well. I mean, you only need to look at those countries that have royal families. When you look at their lineages you find, for example, that you can have a king or a queen of the United Kingdom of Danish or Greek origins, or you can have one in Spain likewise. But I'm not saying this to state that it is a bad thing. I'm saying there has to be a recognition that states have been built through movement.

► *How do you counter narratives that are so centred on toxicity? You leverage the benefits. When you do a cost-benefit analysis, you find that many of the benefits of migration far outweigh the risks.*

How do you counter narratives that are so centred on toxicity? You leverage the benefits. When you do a cost-benefit analysis, you find that many of the benefits of migration far outweigh the risks. I have to stress that there are risks. But if you can effectively manage the benefits,

you can address some of the risks. If the risk is criminality, you address criminality regardless of the perpetrator's nationality. Because unfortunately, whether a crime is perpetrated by someone from the Middle East or someone from Western Europe, what you need to deal with is the crime itself, and the individual. Then you can identify what your key challenges are. Let's say it's crime, it's violence, or it's access to resources. You address those issues. On the positive side, you can look at how migrants have been integral in the construction of cities. Some of the more vibrant cities in Europe would not be as vibrant without migrants.

AB: I don't know if I'm being too pragmatic here, but I feel tempted to repeat over and over that we do need migration in Europe – to meet our demographic and our economic labour market challenges because Europe's population is ageing. Maybe this should be the first argument when trying to convince someone, who is on completely the opposite side, that migrants are not a threat.

OAM: Based on demography alone, Africa is a growing continent: we have a median age of 19. Europe, on the other hand, is an ageing continent with over 40 as the median age across most of Western Europe. You can have a high level of exchange around what Europe, as a continent, needs. But **migration, or the debate around migration, is very much a topic of personal rights.** That is, the biggest statistics matter for analysing the dynamics, but it is by appealing to communities directly that one can address the problem. If you address it by saying, 'actually, we're just going to import people, right?', it becomes a conversation that suggests that whether it's Africans or Asians, they are only here for their labour. So, if you then see an African having a drink on a Tuesday afternoon and not in the workplace, suddenly someone will say, 'but no, you're supposed to come here to work', and 'you're supposed to be working, you're supposed to be building a road'. And this creates another point at which

this discourse can be toxic. So yes, balance the very real need for Europe to be able to have people that work in particular sectors as needed. But also respond to the very human face of this discourse.

Many communities where we see these tensions are communities that 'do not have'. These are communities that themselves rely on the state for services, social or otherwise. While we're bringing in people for labour, it's not going to be easy when you're talking to people who may say, but I'm the one who wants to work. So you have to balance it out. You have to look both on the pragmatic side, as you say, but you also have to recognise that you are effectively dealing with very human arguments – whether it's their way of life, whether it's questions of integration. But **it's very important not to take the human out of this conversation because, fundamentally, the thing that steers the migration debate is the fact that people can put a face to it.**



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A vintage television set is shown with a stack of three books resting on top of it. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter. The text 'PROGRESSIVE READS & VIEWS' is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font across the middle of the image. A thin white horizontal line is positioned below the text.

PROGRESSIVE READS & VIEWS

The untold chapters of European integration

by Ania Skrzypek



Karl Magnus Johansson and Tapio Raunio

Transnational Parties and Advocacy in European Integration

.....
London, 2024

Since the beginning of the century, the somewhat tautological narrative of *delivering the deliverables* has framed the world of politics. Parties, especially the so-called 'traditional' ones, approach elections with a long and detailed list of what they claim to have been their achievements and with an even longer list enumerating the 'as concrete as possible' policies they pledge to strive for. They believe that showcasing determination and competence will bequeath them credibility and earn back voters' trust. Initially, this approach was about reconnecting with citizens and restoring their confidence in politics and politicians. However, as a side effect, it has also transformed the relationship between the electorate and their representatives into a transactional one. **Part of the legacy of the delivering the deliverables philosophy is therefore the idea that politics should be measurable – if not by anything else, then at least by the size of the stakeholders' influence over the trajectory of political developments.**

Meanwhile, political science has tried to keep up, and several methodologies now enable a

more quantitative approach. However, they do not appear to be extensive enough, and thus fall short – especially when it comes to evaluating the politics of the European Union. The challenges therefore remain. How can you measure the power of a single stakeholder in a complex reality in which any decision requires time, multilayered compromise and consensus? How can you see the impact of a single school of political thought amidst the perpetual need to build grand coalitions? These questions inspired a monograph by two outstanding European scholars – Karl Magnus Johansson and Tapio Raunio – *Transnational Parties and Advocacy in European Integration*.

► *Part of the legacy of the delivering the deliverables philosophy is the idea that politics should be measurable – if not by anything else, then at least by the size of the stakeholders' influence over the trajectory of political developments.*

Their work is an important contribution to the research discipline that examines the history and exceptional character of the 'Europarties'. Johansson and Raunio, as well as several others who examine this topic, rightfully argue that Europarties (and their historical predecessors) are key but under-analysed actors within the European Communities. That is especially true regarding the political groups in the European Parliament, other EU institutions and stakeholders actively forging the trajectory of European integration. The authors claim that this is not only an omission that tempers the real picture of how (and thanks to whom) the Union has been consolidating, but that it is also an academic gap that can be bridged. Consequently, in their monograph they propose how this gap can be bridged in a sound and proficient manner that attempts to quantify the influence of these Europarties. In other words, the authors' ambitious aim is to complete the history of the EU with the chapters so far untold of the main heroes and heroines: the EPP (European People's Party), the PES (Party of European Socialists)

and the ALDE Party (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party). The choice of the three – and to exclude the European Greens – is because these three have played their parts ever since the beginning of the European Coal and Steel Community.

The book is divided into six chapters and spans 192 pages. In the first chapter, the authors define the Europarties and explain what makes them dissimilar from national political parties.

The authors' point about exceptionalism feeds into a long-running debate between scholars on evaluating the Europarties, and it supports the school that claims that the differences between the EU and any partisan system are so substantial that there is no use applying the same methodology. In this spirit, the authors propose applying the ACF (advocacy-coalition framework) model to try and depict the Europarties' impact. This is a pioneering approach, especially as it paves the way for the authors to point to the role of the Europarties as the agenda-setters at the EU level; as organisations in charge of the coordination of the leaders of the respective governments ahead of the Councils; and recently also as organisations extending their prerogatives for European Parliament campaigns including through opening towards innovations such as direct membership (local level activism).

The authors claim that the Europarties have been the protagonists in the progressing politicisation of the EU – which, for the intragovernmental tier in which they operate, should not be seen as something that has either happened by default or that has been a transposition of the work by the political groups inside the other, federal, tier of the EU.

The subsequent chapters of Johansson and Raunio's book examine the organisational developments of the Europarties and their perseverance in stretching the space, multiplying the resources and increasing the prerogatives with which the EU legislation has equipped them. Consequently, **even if their relative power and capacity to act always depends on the sum of the stances of their member parties, the Europarties could eventually**

start proposing what the common projects for Europe should be – rather than only trying to amalgamate the agenda, being driven by national understandings instead. The transformative and emancipating moments came with the Single European Act, the Maastricht Treaty and the 2003 regulation governing political parties at European level, which all catalysed the power of the Europarties, engaging them in intergovernmental conferences, discussions about the new treaties and the recent Conference on the Future of Europe. Regarding the latter, this is pioneering research and conclusions can be particularly instructive for those Europarties that after 2024 saw a decline in their vote share in the European Parliament, and that will have to focus on better coordination within their families to maintain the same level of influence to which they were accustomed.

► *The authors claim that the Europarties have been the protagonists in the progressing politicisation of the EU.*

Another valuable aspect of the book is the extensive list of references, which includes an impressive record of recent publications. Still, what is missing is empirical material. Johansson and Raunio state that this is difficult to obtain. However, some more interviews and references to the source documents could have been beneficial, as these could have helped in tracing at least some examples of how ideas were articulated in the Europarties' programmatic documents and progressed to what they became at the end of the legislative processes. To illustrate the point, Johansson and Raunio credit the PES for strengthening the Amsterdam Treaty with the provisions on labour but the authors do not trace back to what the PES had initially aspired. This does not enable an assessment of how far Socialists succeeded in changing the EU while they were leading in 12 out of 15 governments.

This is a question that many scholars have approached from other angles. Interviews could therefore have offered a more nuanced understanding of certain historical moments. The authors tend to credit the EPP for a pivotal role around the Treaty of Maastricht and its article on Europarties. But the recorded exchanges with Enrique Barón Crespo, who was from the Socialist Group and who was the President of the European Parliament between 1989 and 1992, suggest a different interpretation of the dynamics and the negotiations among the leaders of the three parties (coincidentally at that time all Belgians).

All in all, *Transnational Parties and Advocacy in European Integration* by is an insightful academic monograph but also an inspiring manual for all who wish to gain a better understanding of EU-level politics. **The authors are right that the Europarties are still an underestimated topic and an overlooked actor. One can therefore only hope that the readers will be eager to take up the baton and analyse some of the open questions that feature as a teaser in the conclusions.** But the book is not only about the mission of unveiling an untold side of the story. It is a very up-to-date arrival and resonates with some of the processes that are currently ongoing, including the rise of the radical right in Europe, polarisation and fragmentation on the one hand, and the politicisation of the European Commission and the emergence of a new political constellation in place of the grand coalition, on the other. The authors suggest that the environment for the Europarties is changing – and those who aspire to see them persevere, thrive and lead, should see this book as providing foresight and as an inspiration for their creative and strategic thinking.



Ania Skrzypek,
FEPS Director for
Research and Training



Can citizen panels save Europe?

Reflections on the Conference on the Future of Europe

by Alex White



Alvaro Oleart

Democracy without Politics in EU Citizen Participation. From European Demoi to Decolonial Multitude

London, 2023

Rome wasn't built in a day, but Italy was created with a handshake.

When Giuseppe Garibaldi met King Vittorio Emanuele II in Teano back in 1860, modern Italy was born. Fast-forward 160 years, and a random European citizen in Campania, Italy, answers the phone to a surprise call from Brussels: "Can you take part in the Conference on the Future of Europe?"

What does one thing have to do with the other?

Everything, according to Alvaro Oleart's *Democracy without Politics in EU Citizen Participation*, which uses Antonio Gramsci's idea of a 'passive revolution' to understand the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE). Gramsci looked across at the French Revolution, which seemed much more active than the Italian version and made

significantly more changes to who held the ruling power. By contrast, the *Risorgimento* changed little materially and kept the same Italian aristocrats in power. **Oleart implies that the elites of the European institutions recently attempted a similar passive revolution with the CoFoE. Public institutions lacking democratic legitimacy are increasingly attempting to cover it up with citizen panels**, according to Oleart, who calls this the "citizen turn".

Democracy without Politics starts with Oleart's research into the CoFoE but launches into much broader questions. Is there a European people? Why stop at Europe? Is there a better way of building a more democratic world? In around 250 pages, Oleart takes us through a re-imagining of European studies as we know it, critiquing the Eurocentric way in which academia conceives of the EU.

Thinking of a European people is extremely *passé*, it turns out. The European demos does not exist in any meaningful way, and while due attention is given to the popular European studies idea of 'demoicracy', a polity of multiple distinct peoples (at least 27 different ones in the case of the EU), this is not the solution either. Oleart considers 'sovereignty' and 'the people' to be conservative ideas that legitimise existing political structures and protect the position of certain groups over others. **The major theoretical contribution of this book is the 'decolonial multitude', a new activist way of conceiving of the demos.** 'Decolonial' because of an awareness of how the European continent became rich and of the power relations that still exist now, as shown by migration policies and trade flows. 'Multitude' because of the interlinked world, where corporations operate globally but social movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo also function across borders.

Back to the Conference itself.

Why did the EU organise the CoFoE in the first place? Well, the Commission and Council appear to be conscious of the lack of public involvement in their work. Brexit helped the European institutions learn that there is a perceived lack of democratic legitimacy. Previously, Brussels had experienced a 'participatory turn', where civil society actors helped bridge the gap between the elusive European citizen and the institutions. This is not without its problems. **The highly politicised policy specialists who work in the 'Brussels bubble' today are mostly business actors who are united by a neoliberal perspective. This failure to establish a real conduit between the EU citizens and institutions has led to a need for a more 'direct' democracy: the 'citizen turn'.** Oleart sees this as a sanitised and institutionalised version of grassroots political movements like the *Indignados*. The idea that democracy does not need politics, just citizen panels, is totally wrong for Oleart.

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Political parties, NGOs and trade unions were excluded from the CoFoE, as the Common Secretariat sought to create a 'politically neutral' space. The CoFoE attempted to avoid 'partisan dynamics'. Through examples and theory, Oleart criticises this very notion, pointing out that 'neutral' means the status quo. Individualising participation is problematic, and organisations like unions and political parties are legitimate actors for political change.

For Oleart, democracy without politics is inherently related to a rose-tinted nostalgia for the myth that democracy was born in Europe, in ancient Athens.

Kafkaesque anecdotes abound. A theatre crew, in a post-CoFoE panel organised by the Commission, provides direct responses to citizens' points in the form of improvisation, but only in French and with delayed interpretation (the interpreters also acted). The first few sessions included deliberations based on completely incorrect facts about the EU, like discussions about activities that the EU should do, which it was already doing. The organisers introduced fact-checkers, but there were huge delays in the fact-checking process, and when citizens asked the present observers to verify certain points, organisers forbade them from replying.

Oleart makes severe criticisms of the way the CoFoE was operated. He observes that **the seminars focused on such vague topics that it was nearly impossible for people to engage with them.** He questions the selection of experts. At the same time, he acknowledges the enormity of the challenges of organising the CoFoE with citizens from across the EU, in a multilingual context, with no precedents to build upon.

Ultimately, the CoFoE concluded that citizens mostly want what the EU is already doing. **The Commission proudly noted that the recommendations covered about 80 per cent of its work programme. How convenient, notes Oleart, who argues that the methodology was always going to lead us here.** For the Commission, the main result of the CoFoE is its adoption of post-CoFoE citizen panels, its new way of 'consulting' people. Thinking of democracy in an EU context requires some reflection on the broader material structures that underline it, Oleart argues. The CoFoE – either accidentally or deliberately – sidelined political actors who sought to significantly change the system. And the CoFoE was engineered in a way that ensured that it could not change much.

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Oleart's blistering critique of the CoFoE is engaging, enjoyable and sometimes constructive. He dedicates significant space to the CoFoE's operational problems, and does not seem to think they are salvageable. It feels as if he is torn: should the CoFoE be engaged with or should it be discarded entirely?

What does Oleart propose? His thought-provoking commentary on the CoFoE is a fun read, but what would he do instead? Some alternative grassroots movements are mentioned, like Palestine encampments at universities, but it is unclear how progressive actors can engage with existing institutional initiatives like the CoFoE. Yet that is his point. Perhaps everyone should just start again.

And surely the EU's most glaring democratic deficit is the European Parliament's lack of right of initiative. Giving the Parliament more power is not a panacea, but it could be a step towards improving democracy in the EU, and the question is hardly addressed. There again, this is not Oleart's main concern. He seeks a truly international and decolonial movement towards material change that puts 'the people' – however that notion is understood – in the driving seat. He wants a decolonial multitude straining and organising towards a better world for everyone.

This piece represents the personal views of the author and not those of the S&D Group.



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Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles

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Akerman, 1971

Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* is a masterpiece of minimalist cinema that uses its form to deliver a profound critique of patriarchy and its effects on women's lives. Released in 1975, the film remains as relevant as ever in illuminating the political dimensions of domestic labour, the invisibility of women's experiences, and the constraints imposed by societal expectations. Akerman's film follows Jeanne, a widowed mother, over the course of three days as she performs her routine household chores with mechanical precision. The narrative meticulously captures the mundanity of her life: peeling potatoes, scrubbing bathtubs and preparing meals. At first glance, these repetitive actions appear benign. However, as the days progress and Jeanne's routine begins to unravel, the film exposes the psychological toll of the oppressive roles women are often forced to embody.

The feminist issues in *Jeanne Dielman* are deeply intertwined with the film's depiction of unpaid domestic labour as a site of systemic oppression. By dedicating three hours and twenty minutes to these activities, Akerman transforms what society deems insignificant into a political act. Jeanne's life is structured entirely around serving others – a reality that reflects the patriarchal relegation of women to the private sphere. Her sideline as a sex worker to support herself adds another layer of commentary on how women's labour, both domestic and sexual, is commodified and undervalued.

Akerman's use of the female gaze is a central element of the film's power. Unlike mainstream cinema, which often objectifies women through a voyeuristic male lens, *Jeanne Dielman* observes its protagonist with quiet respect and unflinching detail. The static, unintrusive camera forces the viewer to engage with Jeanne's perspective and experience her growing disquiet. By doing this, Akerman challenges cinematic conventions and reclaims agency for her subject, positioning her as the centre of her own narrative. The political dimension of the film lies in its ability to reveal the violence embedded in the banal. Jeanne's eventual breakdown – a shocking act of rebellion against her stifling existence – becomes a statement against the systemic dehumanisation of women. It underscores how societal structures, rather than overt acts, perpetuate oppression.

In *Jeanne Dielman*, Akerman not only redefined feminist filmmaking but also exposed the radical potential of cinema to interrogate power and reclaim silenced voices. The film remains a touchstone for understanding the intersection of politics, gender and the art of storytelling.

Laetitia Thissen



Women talking

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Sarah Polley, 2022

Women talking is "an act of female imagination". The direction, screenplay, production, book on which the film is based, and even the music, are (almost) entirely the product of women's creativity. But that is not the point. And Sarah Polley, who wrote and directed *Women talking* in 2022, tells us this at the very beginning of the film. Even if the story is inspired by appalling true events (that took place in a Mennonite colony in Bolivia about 15 years ago – although you only find this out by reading about the film on the internet), they are only an excuse to speak about women's subjugation, patriarchy, and the road to self-determination and empowerment.

It is women's voices that we hear throughout this film. The only male character is there to take notes (a task usually entrusted to a female secretary) because he can do what the women have never been taught to do – read and write – thus ensuring that their subjection can be continued. Yet their voices are not those of ignorant and crushed women. They are exceptionally strong, profound and sophisticated – to the extent that there is an apparent inconsistency between the setting of the film (the backward Mennonite colony), the characters (the illiterate Mennonite women) and the dialogues. But here is where the initial disclaimer comes in to help. It does not matter where and when the story takes place. Because this story has happened, still happens, and – sadly – could happen again anywhere, anytime. It is women's thousand-year-old story.

The film is also about the still recent journey of women to self-awareness, to the recognition of their own value and of the cultural conditioning they have experienced since birth – a cultural conditioning in which they are the object and at the same time the instrument, and which affects men as well. Yet this cultural conditioning should not serve as an alibi for men's crimes and complicity. It is hard to leave behind something you have lived your entire life – but education (epitomised in the figure of the notetaker) together with collective action and solidarity are the way out.

Dialogues are all that matter in *Women talking*. The scene is mostly set in a hayloft, but it is never claustrophobic because the women's talking gives it breadth. Nevertheless, the dialogues are also the film's weak point as they are, at times, too cerebral and artificial. Despite this, however, the film carries a powerful message. And a question remains with you at the end: 'how would it make you feel if, for your entire life, it did not matter what you thought?'

Hedwig Giusto

BOOK

The politics of polycrisis



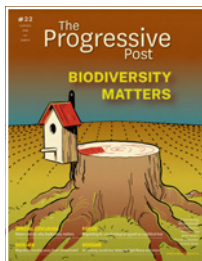
Rising challenges of insecurity and inequality – from climate change to the rise of the far right, economic crisis, and the creation of new types of jobs that do not protect workers – have reinstated the need for social democratic parties to strategise for success.

Drawing on insights from across the EU and UK, the book "The Politics of Polycrisis" presents new ideas for restoring social democracy, tackling topics including the green transition, the rise of platform work, industrial policy, and artificial intelligence.

With authors including Commissioner for Housing and Energy Dan Jørgensen, Members of the European Parliament Andreas Schieder, Hana Jalloul and Matthias Ecke, MP Miapetra Kumpula-Natri, academics Andrew Gamble and Patrick Diamond, and many more.



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N°26 - Autumn/Winter 2024

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ISSN 2506-7362

3.00 €