

FOREWORD

Bravery in the new world

In this sixth edition of FEPS Progressive Yearbook, we look back on a year of decisive elections and ahead to a cycle when the political arithmetic in the EU will be different from anything in living memory.

Last June, a new European Parliament was elected, and, by the end of the year, a new EU leadership was inaugurated. Meanwhile, the elections in the US and UK went in opposite directions: one to the right; the other to the left. Not only citizens but also parliamentarians are full of questions about what these changes mean in specific policy fields: economics, climate and migration, to name just a few.

In 2024, the political map of Europe became even more imbalanced. Therefore, FEPS thought that the decision on the Progressive Person of the Year should highlight something that has become very difficult for our political family in recent years: improving the positions of Social Democrats on the EU's eastern flank. This also reflects the fact that the EU has a geopolitical puzzle to be solved in Eastern Europe.

The paramount question is how the course of the Russo-Ukrainian war will change in 2025 and whether it will be brought to a halt, a standstill or even some kind of deal after three years. But it is also a question of how we draw conclusions from this experience of aggression and devastation to build security for ourselves and perhaps also for the wider world. Whether the EU can become a defence actor will be tested in the coming year.

When a new transatlantic momentum is created to boost competitiveness through deregulation and financialisation, the resilience of our social model will again be under pressure. Trade unions have started to mobilise against cuts, and we might again head towards a new round of social confrontation, requiring bravery.

The question, however, is not only to resist but also to uphold a progressive alternative: an agenda to take the high road to prosperity and sustainability in the long run while addressing the stubborn cost-of-living crisis in the short run, boosting investment in crucial fields of innovation and assisting critical sectors, like the automotive industry, in a period of transformation and global competition.

2025 will be a year when more will have to be done for the resilience of EU policies, and even more for the capacity of the EU to go further in the regulation of digital technology and artificial intelligence. However, consistency in building such a programme, focusing on the social dimension, requires not only opposition to the far right but also a critical assessment of the emboldened centre-right forces. Whether it is about the Middle East or other regions, Social Democrats can again emerge as a leading voice for peace, even if sometimes it requires as much courage as needed to extend solidarity at times of war.

The authors of this yearbook interpret current political, economic, social and cultural trends, which should help develop a new, transformative progressive strategy. The chronology of 2024 allows readers to look back, and the predictions at the end of the volume stimulate thinking about the next steps in key areas, battlefields and negotiating tables.

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