

## FOREWORD

# Europe beyond the shock

In 2025, even at the centre and on the right side of the European political spectrum, many references to Antonio Gramsci were made. The great Italian anti-fascist thinker wrote in his prison notebooks: “The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters”.

When a handshake between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin becomes the symbol of this monstrous period, it is not at all clear what kind of new world wants to be born. What was clarified in 2025: the transatlantic alliance is broken, and the departure of the United States from the common platform of international law and liberal values will have a great impact on how peace will be restored on our continent and what kind of economic and social model we can maintain and develop in the foreseeable future.

With so many unexpected twists and turns, 2025 was a year when the resilience of EU policies was thoroughly tested. EU leaders found themselves in a maze, not always knowing when a policy action would serve a MAGA or a MEGA objective. MAGA has become the code name for the new American nationalism and unilateralism, while MEGA could refer to an agenda to deepen EU integration with economic prosperity and social justice at its heart, and make a decisive move towards European sovereignty. MAGA and MEGA would not have been contradictory some decades or even years ago, but now, the new era of hostilities threatens basically everything the EU member states have built since the end of the Cold War.

In this seventh edition of the FEPS Progressive Yearbook, we are looking back on this rollercoaster year. The challenge to our democratic polity and social market economy has not been limited to external factors. In 2025, the true consequences of the recent European Parliament elections became apparent, and the pro-European centrist bloc has been systematically undermined by a flirtation and occasional collaboration between the centre right and the far right. The seriousness of this should not be underestimated.

What was a skirmish last spring, became a full-scale attack on European democratic values, regulatory autonomy and the integrity of the EU single market. If, under such circumstances, the EU decides to adapt and remain ‘constructive’, it risks backsliding in all possible areas: climate policies; consumer rights; and even gender equality. In this situation, the question is not only how to resist but also how to develop and uphold a progressive alternative that is both principled and practical.

If 2025 was a ‘Year Zero’, 2026 must be the beginning of the recovery, developing a new strategy and mobilising intellectual resources. The chronology of 2025 enables readers to look back, and the predictions at the end of the volume stimulate further thought about

the next stage. In this phase of reconstruction, it is also the role of progressive think tanks to draw attention to outstanding academic achievements, which we have also connected with the choice of the Progressive Person of the Year.

The exact prediction of how political, economic, social and cultural developments will unfold in 2026 is not possible. The point, however, is that the EU cannot just be a witness; it must be the creator of the new era, starting with Eastern Europe, where peace and reconstruction appear at the heart of the agenda. It is not enough to just repeat as a mantra that the EU needs to become a defence actor; we also need a genuine strategy to reconcile the construction of European sovereignty with the strengthening of social cohesion and environmental sustainability.

Thematically focused chapters on the big issues of our time, policy and specific country studies structure this yearbook, as well as the assessment of the highlights of EU politics that help us move forward against the strong headwinds of this turbulent period. With such reviews of scholarly investigation and detailed stocktaking, we want to make analysis more sophisticated and policies sounder, ensuring that all this can make a difference when it comes to political practice.

The congress of PES in Amsterdam in 2025 announced mobilisation (in Europe and beyond) to be the focus of our collective ambition and action in the coming period, and this needs to gain momentum in 2026. Thanks to the authors of this yearbook, we can reflect on the necessities, clarify opportunities and sharpen the arguments to face the struggles that lie ahead.