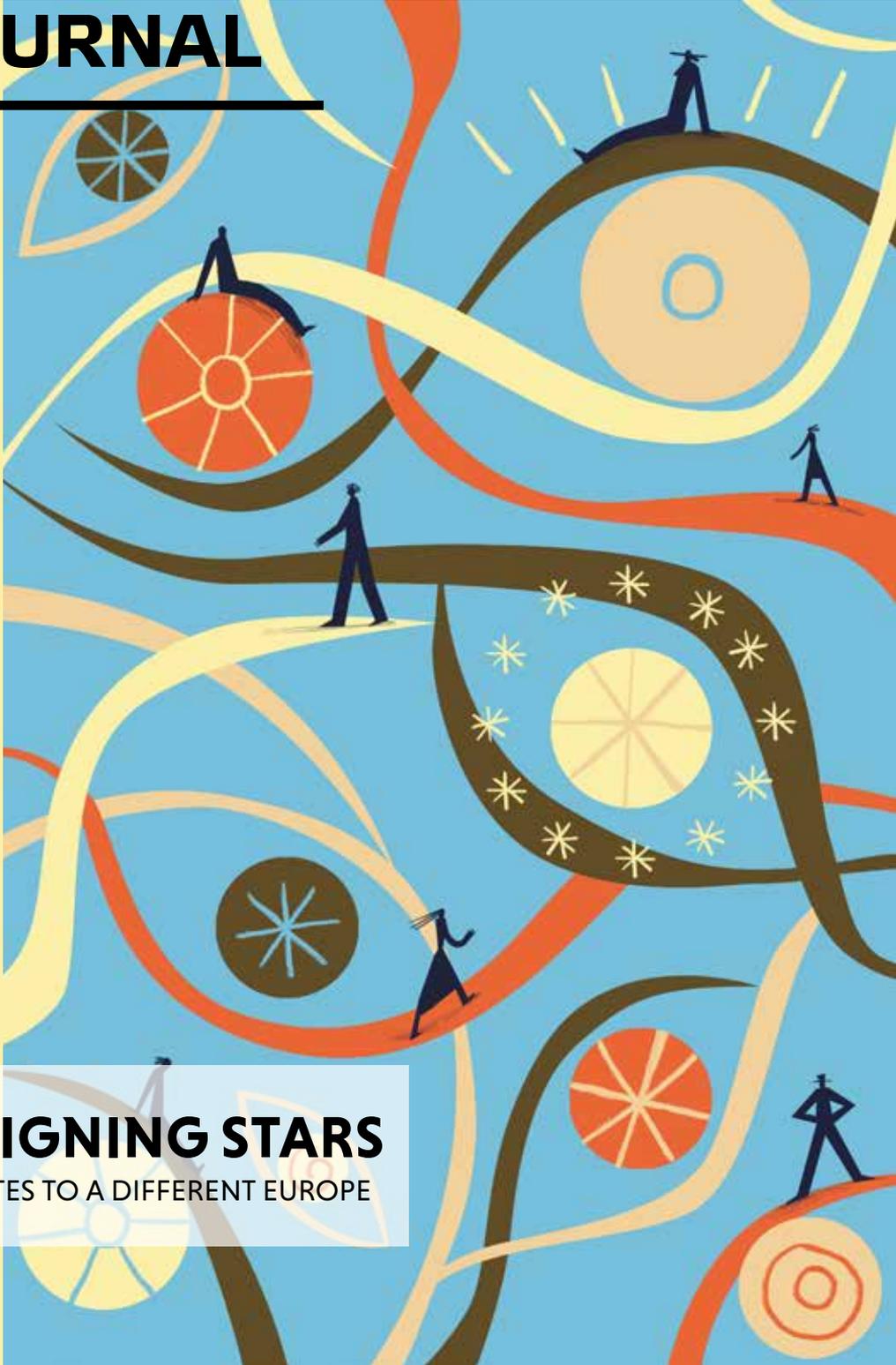


# GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL

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VOLUME 26  
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ROUTES TO A DIFFERENT EUROPE



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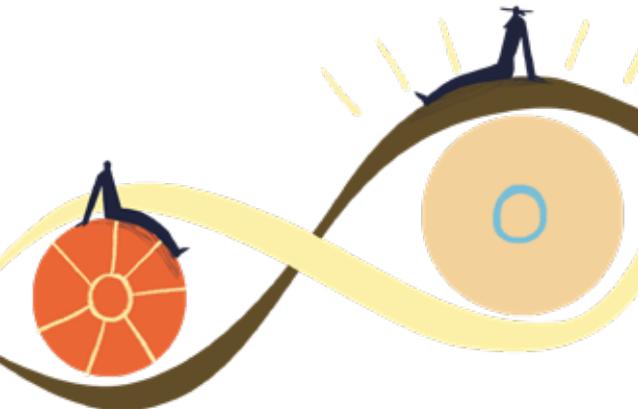
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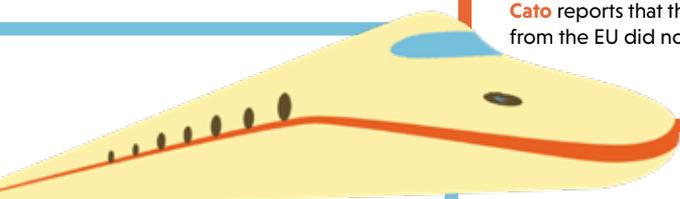
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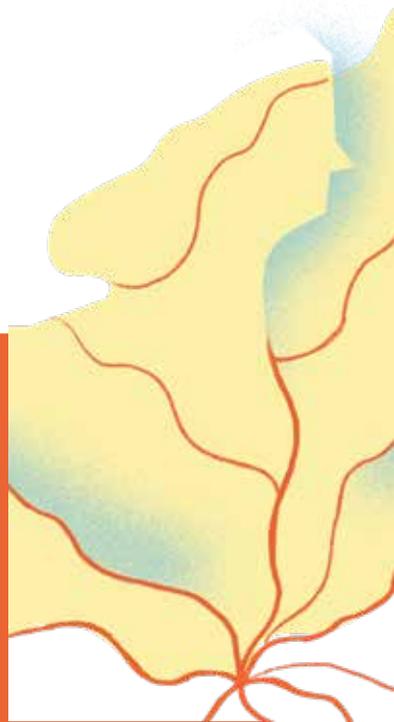
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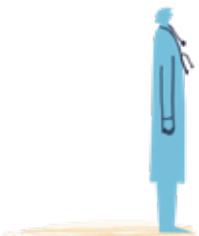
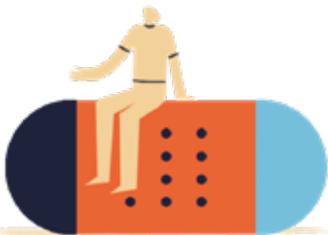
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# EDITO

## ROADS TO PURSUE

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The adage that Europe is “forged in crises” has come back into vogue over the past few years. While the eurozone crisis sharpened divisions between EU member states and fuelled stereotypes, the European project has navigated successive global upheavals with remarkable unity – at least until recently.

If the aftermath of Brexit in the UK illustrated the deleterious consequences of withdrawing from the Union for people, businesses, and political stability, the response to other crises – including the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate emergency, and the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine – has highlighted more assertive and future-oriented aspects of European integration. The reaction to the pandemic offered a taste of health cooperation and strengthened social protection and public investment based on shared commitment. The Green Deal emphasises the EU’s role in coordinating transformative policies in member states and provides evidence of the power of democratic contestation: the demands of the climate movement played a crucial role in shaping a central pillar of the European project for the years ahead. And the war in Ukraine, as well as sparking spontaneous solidarity with refugees in EU countries, has revived the enlargement process, which seemed to have lost momentum in previous years.

However, these examples of unity also have a darker side, and the steps forward they represent are not irreversible. Executive decision-making highlighted the EU’s longstanding democratic deficit, while intra-European solidarity has become increasingly exclusionary, reflecting a political shift

# D R I A L

to the Right in several member states. The flipside of health protection in the pandemic, for example, was vaccine hoarding to the detriment of both less-wealthy countries and democratic transparency, and once the health emergency had subsided, the austerity mantra made its comeback to EU policy-making. Climate policies are the source of new divisions in European societies, which we explored in the summer 2023 edition. And as Putin's war in Ukraine gave rise to a clash-of-civilisations rhetoric in Europe, the energy crisis laid bare the opportunistic ties cultivated with the Russian autocrat. Almost two years into the conflict, support for Ukraine is showing signs of faltering.

Perhaps most glaringly, hardline positions on immigration – previously the preserve of far-right forces – have become mainstream since the 2015 migrant crisis. While the dire demographic reality of EU countries dictates openness to migration flows behind the scenes, the public discourse on the issue has taken on identitarian tones. In the EU lexicon, “promoting our European way of life” is semantically close to keeping migrants out of “Fortress Europe”.

All this paints a picture of the simultaneous advancement and fraying of the European project. Pro-Europeans have too often considered resilience to crises a sufficient prerequisite for its strengthening, neglecting the importance of political vision and democratic engagement. Today, the inadequacy of that reactive understanding of integration is being exposed. Without a shared vision for the future, the EU risks finding itself buffeted by the winds of crisis in both its internal direction and its posture towards prospective members and the rest of the world.

For this reason, this edition sets out to explore different routes for Europe and what they tell us about the past, present, and future of the Union. With crucial EU elections just a few months away, more than just necessary to understand where Europe is heading, this exercise is urgent to politicise its choices.

A key question is the relationship between a geographical and a political Europe. Past attempts to solve the EU's democratic deficit foundered on the failure of institutional reforms, while efforts to create a European public sphere have remained largely elitist projects. As the long stalemate of enlargement is reversed, how to ensure democratic representation and effective decision-making remains an open question. Talk of a multi-speed Europe has gained ground in recent months in order to ensure that the promise of EU membership is not postponed indefinitely. This is not least because attitudes towards the EU in aspiring member states are not immune to fatigue and disappointment, as the "Meanings of Europe" series explores in this edition.

On migration, a truly progressive Europe needs to reject the dominant framing of the issue, which has turned the bloc's external borders into a graveyard. To bring Europe closer to its stated values of freedom of movement, inclusion, and community, Aleksandra Savanović proposes looking at migration through a utopian lens.

Fighting dominant narratives is no easy task, not only on migration. Even when they are not (yet) in power, conservative forces exert ever-greater influence on the political agenda. Above all, though they envision a "Europe of nations", they are more transnationally organised than ever before. The growing backlash against women and gender rights, for instance, is Europe-wide and well-resourced. A different Europe will need to build alliances and enhance support for democratic movements, explains Ségolène Pruvot in her contribution.

Finally, in the fight against climate change, a progressive vision entails pursuing true social and climate justice instead of regressive policies and a new green colonialism. In the opening interview of this edition, Spain's labour minister Yolanda Díaz says that Europe needs to build on the positive sparks seen during the pandemic to make solidarity a structural element of the European project, especially when it comes to climate politics. Only a shared vision for a desirable future can tackle the growing backlash against the green transition. Focusing on concrete policies such as local renewable energy, public transport, and universal childcare can help bring the Green Deal home.

Today, positive scenarios may seem a far cry from the reality of European politics. Internally, the Union is increasingly entrenched in cultural battles – a domain that favours the Right – while on the international stage it looks divided and irrelevant, as shown most recently in the turmoil in the Middle East. However, the rise of conservatives and global realignment suggest that stalling is not an option.

History may offer progressives some comfort: visionary thinking and necessity have coexisted since the very origins of the European project in the ashes of World War II. Federalist thinking, born under Nazi-fascist oppression to imagine a post-national democracy in a peaceful continent, bears vivid witness to this. Today, that distinctive characteristic – visionary, but firmly grounded in social and environmental reality – is embodied by the Europe of democratic movements, cultural and ethnic diversity, and transnational grassroots solidarity. It is this Europe that political ecology stands for.

Examples of progressive mobilisation and positive electoral outcomes in Spain and Poland show that a right-wing surge is not inevitable, but the challenge ahead runs deeper than a compelling campaign. More than a destination to be reached, a progressive Europe is an ongoing and collective effort towards a sustainable, inclusive future. Not the solo of a charismatic leader, but a polyphony of voices able to speak as one.

*The Green European Journal has gone through many changes in recent months. If it can navigate them with confidence, it is thanks to the outstanding work of editor-in-chief Jamie Kendrick and editorial and project officer Jennifer Kwao. The journal team and the editorial board express their gratitude to both and wish them the very best in their professional journey.*

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# EUROPE'S TURNING POINT

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AN INTERVIEW WITH  
**YOLANDA DÍAZ** BY  
**ROSA MARTÍNEZ  
RODRÍGUEZ**

After responding with solidarity to multiple crises in recent years, Europe now stands at a crossroads between a return to the ancien régime of austerity and a Union based on ambitious climate action and robust social protection. Confronted with a conservative resurgence ahead of the 2024 EU elections, Greens and progressives need to join forces and stretch their imaginations, argues Sumar's leader Yolanda Díaz.

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**ROSA MARTÍNEZ RODRÍGUEZ:** The European Union built its shared institutions on the neoliberal consensus that markets know best, and the job of the state is to enable their functioning. Now that consensus is crumbling across the world. What does this mean for Europe?

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**YOLANDA DÍAZ:** The agreement on the European recovery plan during the pandemic was a really important turning point, not because of its budget – which was by no means insignificant – or because of its content but rather because of its underlying principles. The agreement demonstrated that there was another way of doing things, that it was possible to change the economic approach to European politics, which many had believed, up to that point, to be constrained by market forces.

Now, over three years later, the European project finds itself at another historic crossroads, with two possible routes. The first is neoliberal reconfiguration, which essentially consists in safeguarding the privileges of upper-class Europeans. This first route will guarantee that the

mistakes made in Maastricht and Lisbon are repeated, and will lead us back to obsolete fiscal rules that are incapable of responding to current challenges and unfit to ensure a fair digital and ecological transition. This is also the road towards a Pact on Migration and Asylum, which reinforces the current outsourced, security-based model that has turned the Mediterranean Sea into a mass grave.

The second route is one that aims to protect the majority of Europeans and confront the climate crisis. It's the route I mentioned before, that of a Europe which, after the dismal handling of the 2008 economic crisis, managed to protect workers during the pandemic. It is the route of recovery funds that, despite their limitations, showed that we can do everything we'd been told was impossible for decades.

Following [EU "founding father"] Jean Monnet's idea that Europe is forged in crisis, we should build on this turning point that came about in response to the coronavirus crisis. We should move from repairing to preparing, as [economist] Mariana Mazzucato would say. Abandon once and for all the doomed policies of austerity and focus on embedding public investment plans, fiscal stimulus, and tried-and-tested tools such as the SURE mechanism [to safeguard employment in emergency situations]. We have to nurture those glimmers of enlightenment that we saw during the pandemic and make them the permanent, dependable rules of the game.

### **What is the role of the green transition in this second route you describe? Can climate policy contribute to making Europe more social and reduce inequalities?**

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In order to take this positive route, it is essential for the EU to become a superpower in the fight against climate change. At a point of global realignment, in which Europe has yet to find a truly autonomous profile, this role is key.

Because of its legal power, its defence of climate diplomacy, its size, and other factors, the EU is capable of being the driving force behind democratically and socially responsible ecological planning on a global scale, an example of climate policy for the rest of the world to follow.

Over the last few months, we have witnessed a worrying attempt to dismantle the European Green Deal. We have seen this with the Nature Restoration Law and with the statements of Ursula von der Leyen and Emmanuel Macron, who are calling for a slowdown of the green European agenda.

Faced with this alliance of climate deniers and delayers, we have to say, loud and clear, that reaching climate objectives is more urgent now than it has ever been. An expanded European Green Deal, with renewed ambition and a more aggressive timeline, has to be our main political focus over the next decade. There is no time to waste.

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PANDEMIC

For this reason, we need to expand the Fit for 55 agenda and strengthen the social mechanisms of the Green Deal such as the Just Transition Fund and the Social Climate Fund. This will ensure that the burden of fighting the climate emergency doesn't fall on the shoulders of workers but on those who pollute the most. We also need to create new tools such as a SURE climate mechanism to protect workers throughout the transition and ensure that it does not have a negative impact on employment.

**Industrial policy is back in vogue, also at the European level. But can it be pursued in a way that increases democratic control over the economy, instead of socialising risks and privatising profits?**

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Europe and its member states need active industrial policy and green industrial planning. What we need is more and better planning to reduce the uncertainty marking the current zeitgeist.

Industrial policy has made a comeback, but it cannot be the same as before. We need long-term, structural transformation of our model of production.

We need green industrial planning to help bring about an economic paradigm shift in the EU by pursuing a truly progressive agenda for workers. Additionally, we need a green reindustrialisation process that puts workers' rights at the centre and makes public aid for companies conditional on their meaningful contribution to a fair ecological and digital transition. The last of these points is of the utmost importance. [Progressive US senator] Bernie Sanders made his support for the US CHIPS Act conditional on companies meeting a series of criteria to benefit workers. It can be done, and it is essential that we do it.

For this reason, green industrial planning also means a fair transition that puts workers front and centre by creating new jobs and improving salaries. This idea was at the forefront of our electoral manifesto for the Spanish elections in July: we spoke about a national energy transformation plan

WE NEED GREEN  
INDUSTRIAL  
PLANNING  
TO HELP BRING  
ABOUT  
AN ECONOMIC  
PARADIGM SHIFT  
IN THE EU

that included rehabilitating 500,000 homes per year, increasing investment in renewable energy, and making Spain a forerunner in electric mobility.

This is also connected to the need for an increase in strategic autonomy that serves the people of Europe, not the financial interests of weapons manufacturers. We need our own industries so that we can make decisions that do not require the blessing of third countries. We need our own industries so that Europe can have its own voice and an independent role in the current context of geopolitical uncertainty.

**In the past few years, Europe has created space for member states to invest more. Spain has been a key force, building coalitions for policies like joint borrowing and the energy windfall tax. What do you see as the interplay between progressive governments at the member state level and progressive leadership at the European level? And can Spain still play that role?**

Spain's role in Europe has changed a lot over the last legislative term. A decade ago, Luis de Guindos, Mariano Rajoy's economy minister, boasted to the Eurogroup that his counter-reform of labour laws was "extremely aggressive". Today, our labour reform is an example to all of Europe that things can be done in a different way. Ten years ago, Spain was on the margins of a Europe that was gripped by austerity. Today, we are coordinating extremely ambitious and successful initiatives at the EU level, such as the directives on minimum wages and pay transparency.

It is a source of pride to see former "PIIGS", and southern Europe as a whole, playing a pioneering and historic leadership role at a time of reconfiguration of the European project.

I am convinced that we can keep playing this role if we continue to be ambitious and innovative, and if we understand this moment not as a time for consolidation but for progress. The choice is between taking small steps forward or great leaps backward.

THE CHOICE IS BETWEEN  
TAKING SMALL STEPS  
FORWARD OR GREAT  
LEAPS BACKWARD

**“Europe is an intergovernmental pact that needs to become a democratic, social and federal project,” you wrote earlier this year.<sup>1</sup> Why does Europe need to make that next step forward? And is this horizon realistic as things stand?**

Well, the international programme of Sumar [the left-wing progressive party founded and led by Díaz] had three main objectives: finding a democratic way out of the great eco-social crisis; reconstructing democracy in Europe by strengthening multilateralism and international law; and moving towards a more socially robust Europe. This last objective is a precondition for the first two, and we need to be ambitious.

We’ve talked about going beyond the Stability and Growth Pact – an obsolete component of the Maastricht Treaty – by making the fight against the climate emergency one of the European Central Bank’s objectives. This could take many forms, including replacing the European Stability Mechanism with a European Debt Agency; moving towards redistributive and integrated fiscal policy that avoids social dumping among member states; legally codifying the European Pillar of Social Rights or the Social Progress Protocol; and democratising the Union’s institutional framework. One final point on realistic horizons. In 1949, while post-war welfare states were being constructed, [economist and political philosopher]

Friedrich Hayek wrote an essay entitled “The Intellectuals and Socialism”, in which he stated that, faced with the victory of Keynesianism, market liberals needed a new, radical utopian vision. Thirty years later, many of Hayek’s views had become mainstream. I think we should learn from the success of neoliberalism. We need transformative horizons, because if we push hard, if we stretch our imagination, we can go much further than we think.

**Progressives are not the only ones with a vision for Europe. Surprisingly, the far right is more transnational than ever. What is the choice before us in your view? What is their Europe, and what is ours?**

Well, I think that we have a lot to learn from that. Despite its many internal differences, the far right has managed, both in Europe and the rest of the world, to build a transnational network and cast itself as a unified, coordinated political actor. I think that progressives need to do the same.

That is why, in the spirit of [Marxist theorist Antonio] Gramsci, I always speak of building a progressive historical bloc, a green historical bloc: a broad and diverse alliance that goes beyond electoral politics; one that incorporates political forces from different traditions alongside social, intellectual, and institutional movements. This can even include sectors that have,

<sup>1</sup> Yolanda Díaz (2023). “Transformar Europa para proteger a la gente”. *Le Grand Continent*. 22 February 2023. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZVR4>>.

up to now, been part of the neoliberal model. To face big challenges, we need big alliances. People do not want us to all be the same, to stop thinking independently – they want us to join forces, to move forward together and improve people’s day-to-day lives. That is Sumar’s innovative vision for Spain, and we now want it to be our contribution to the European stage.

#### **What’s at stake in the 2024 EU elections?**

#### **Why do these elections matter for Spain?**

Everything is at stake in these elections. Our country’s continued relevance in Brussels and, above all else, the future of the European project itself are on the line.

Look, a few months ago in Spain, certain people were declaring victory months before the polls opened. In our country, we have shown that victory is not certain for an alliance between the Right and the far right. On the contrary: it is a thing of the past.

The same is happening now with the European elections. Several months out from the elections, many people in Europe are saying there’s nothing to be done, that there are only two possible outcomes: either an alliance à la Meloni [between the centre right and the far right] or resigning ourselves to the usual grand coalition. That’s simply not the case!



**YOLANDA DÍAZ**

is a Spanish politician and lawyer specialising in labour law. She is Spain’s Minister of Labour and the leader of left-wing party Sumar.



**ROSA MARTÍNEZ RODRÍGUEZ**

is a former Green member of the Spanish Parliament (2015-2019) and was co-spokesperson of the Spanish Green Party (EQUO) from 2014 to 2018. She is currently a manager on transport in Spain at the European Climate Foundation.



# RED LIGHT FOR THE GREEN DEAL?

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ARTICLE BY

PHILIPPA NUTTALL

The European Green Deal has set in motion far-reaching changes and achieved major successes, despite multiple global crises, towards a more sustainable European economy. But culture wars over agriculture, less ambitious industrial policies than those of the EU's global competitors, and unmitigated social impacts risk slowing or stalling the bloc's climate agenda.

In December 2019, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen launched the European Green Deal. The goal, in her words, was “to reconcile the economy with our planet, to reconcile the way we produce and the way we consume with our planet and to make it work for our people”.

Despite the war in Ukraine, significant geopolitical tensions, and the cost of living crisis, the Green Deal is overall a success. The next four years will be more challenging, however, as theory must be turned into reality for all policy areas, ambitious targets implemented, and the social aspects of Europe's green transition addressed.

“The Green Deal is a big step forward towards a more sustainable Europe,” says Jutta Paulus, a German Green MEP elected in 2019. Over the past EU mandate, she has worked on a plethora of Green Deal files: reducing climate pollution from the aviation and marine sectors, increasing energy efficiencies, cutting methane emissions, rolling out renewables, and regulating harmful chemicals. At the same time, she is quite clear, “the Green Deal is not finished” and key parts of legislation remain “open or missing altogether”.

Paulus recognises the real progress made in the climate and energy parts of the Green Deal but underlines how it is still “not enough”. The Nature Restoration Law, which will introduce measures to recover and protect land and sea ecosystems across the EU, went through tough negotiations before being passed.

The reform of REACH – which regulates chemicals in order to protect human health and the environment – has been shelved. Paulus sees all aspects of the Green Deal as mutually reinforcing: “The triple crises of climate warming, biodiversity loss, and pollution can only be tackled holistically.”

This summer, the centre-right grouping, the European People’s Party (EPP), led a backlash against the proposed Nature Restoration Law. The same conservative push to put new environmental policies on hold led to the stalling of the chemicals legislation. “It is unlikely that we will see new REACH regulations before the European elections,” says Paulus.

As first presented by von der Leyen, the Green Deal was a catch-all initiative, “a broad roadmap” covering biodiversity and forests, agriculture and food, green cities, and the circular economy.

Despite these ambitions, agriculture has also largely fallen off the Green Deal agenda. In 2020, the European Commission proposed a

Farm to Fork Strategy. The idea was to move away from the old logic of the Common Agricultural Policy towards a “fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly food system”.

The first major piece of legislation of the plan, the Sustainable Food Systems Framework Law, disappeared from the Commission’s work programme late this year after huge opposition from the EPP. Instead, the Commission president said in her recent State of the Union speech that the Commission wants to organise a “strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture in the EU”. It is unclear exactly what this will achieve. According to WWF’s Tycho Vandermaesen, the Common Agricultural Policy is a “sacred cow” that is the root cause of the climate and nature problems associated with mainstream European agriculture. He is sceptical that any proposed “strategic dialogue” will be prepared to challenge it.

Despite such lacunas, non-profit Climate Action Network Europe’s Klaus Röhrig says the Green Deal has had a “significant impact” on the EU policy agenda. Climate considerations have been mainstreamed across all policy areas, and the agenda has been maintained “even in the face of a considerably challenging international context”. The new context provides a firmer rationale for climate action than ever: “Any rollback would mean ignoring the devastating impacts that an unabated climate crisis would have on

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issues like public health, industrial competitiveness, and food security.”

Ahead of the 2024 European elections, environmental campaigners and politicians at the centre and on the left of the political spectrum are concerned the Green Deal will come under increasing attack.

“A coalition of conservatives, right-wing populists, and right-wing extremists, with a little help from some liberals, are campaigning against the Green Deal, partly through misinformation and building fear,” argues Paulus. She explains how the EPP started spring 2023 with a “kill list” of Green Deal legislation – a U-turn against the legislative agenda of their own Commission president. Paulus suggests the coming months will be a “constant fight against efforts to water down ambition and delay progress”.

## AN INDUSTRIAL TRANSITION

When launching the Green Deal, von der Leyen told her commissioners the initiative was “our new growth strategy – a strategy for growth that gives more back than it takes away”. Proving that policies to bring down emissions and restore nature can create jobs and prosperity would go at least some way to showing that attempts to slow or even halt the Green Deal are misguided.

Yet the goal of turning the Green Deal into an economic strategy has looked in serious jeopardy

at various times this year, despite the launch of the EU Net-Zero Industrial Act and the Critical Raw Materials Act. The two measures aim to protect and develop green industries in the EU through targeted sectoral policies and shoring up supplies of necessary natural resources.

Both the European wind and solar industries have said they are in trouble, not least because of increasing imports from China. The European Commission has seen fit to open an anti-subsidy investigation into EU imports of electric vehicles from China. The “global market is flooded with cheaper electric vehicles,” the price of which “is kept artificially low” owing to “huge state subsidies”, said the Commission president during her State of the Union speech in September.

The Green Deal has been “helpful in operationalising scenarios” about how wind power can be massively increased to the level needed to meet emissions reduction targets, says industry body WindEurope’s Viktoriya Kerelska. Since Russia invaded Ukraine, EU renewables industries have benefitted from various emergency measures agreed by the Commission to help replace Russian gas, such as the RePowerEU plan and packages to ease permit requirements.

It is “good the EU is thinking more about the industrial angle” of the Green Deal, says Kerelska, but she suggests more needs to happen if the energy transition is to be “made in Europe” and live up to its promised economic aspirations.

For the wind industry, doing more would mean making permits even easier to obtain, says Kerelska. The EU passed emergency laws in late 2022 to compel member states to streamline planning permissions for renewable energy projects. However, research published in September 2023 by industry body SolarPower Europe shows that many countries are not implementing the changes. Consequently, solar and wind projects are taking too long to get approved or are failing to make it through overly complicated bureaucratic processes, leading to factory closures as order books remain slim.

Easing permit processes “would help unlock a pipeline of projects”, says Kerelska, and help deliver on the jobs and growth aims of the Green Deal. Across Europe, 18 gigawatts of wind projects “are stuck”, she reveals.

Changing the criteria for renewable energy auctions would also contribute to achieving the economic goals of the Green Deal, says Kerelska. Increasing attention on ways “to shift auctions away from price-only models so they also take into consideration non-price criteria

is welcome”, she argues, calling for auction criteria to include “cyber and data security and the high governance and social standards we should be fulfilling”.

A third solution is for all countries, especially in periods of high inflation like today, to start using indexing in auctions, says Kerelska. Such a move would demonstrate “an understanding of the economic context”, she insists.

## GOOD PLANS MEET EVENTS

A similar conversation on whether the energy transition will be “made in Europe” and whether the EU will reap the rewards in terms of economic prosperity and jobs is also taking place around electric vehicles.

The EU’s decision to phase out the sale of new internal combustion engine vehicles by 2035 has set a clear direction for the car industry. The move from fossil fuel to electric vehicles would be “very hard to reverse”, says William Todts, executive director of non-profit Transport & Environment. “There is political noise, but if you really want to reverse the transition to zero carbon vehicles you need a Trumpian moment,” he states, with reference to the former fossil – fuel-loving US president.

The 2035 end date for the sale of fossil fuel cars in the EU “was accepted, not because NGOs wanted it, but because industry wanted

ON THE MUCH-PROMISED  
SOCIAL ASPECTS OF  
THE EUROPEAN GREEN  
DEAL, THE EU HAS YET  
TO GET STARTED

it,” explains Todts. Car companies want “investment certainty”. The industry is not in the business of making 50-billion-euro commitments and planning new factories and long-term deals with battery suppliers just to “hear a few years later that it was all a joke”.

The fundamental question now is whether the next generation of electric vehicles will be made in the EU. “As it currently stands, no [it won’t be].” Todts cites the huge subsidies being offered by the US and China to support the construction of electric vehicles there. Some EU companies, such as BMW, are investing in factories in China and then shipping cars to Europe. “This is an industrial question,” says Todts. “We can choose between subsidised, cheap EVs made in China or protecting our car industry as it gives jobs and other benefits.”

There are no simple answers to this quandary, but Todts believes the strategy of the Green Deal was “right”, and it is rather “the rules of the game” that have changed in the last 12 to 18 months. “The Green Deal dates from 2019, long before the US started taking this stuff seriously – the Inflation Reduction Act is one year old, and it has been a complete game changer – and relationships with China have changed dramatically,” argues Todts. “It is not that the EU missed something, but that we need to adapt to new circumstances.”

“Our plan was good,” he continues. “Look at the number of battery factories that were planned in Europe, it was phenomenal, and everybody was coming to Europe.” Since the announcement of billions in American subsidies, multinationals have changed plans to go where they get the best deal. The Green Deal was “such a good strategy the Americans and the Chinese copied it, and now they are doing it better than we are”, says Todts. “We have to step up.”

The push to decarbonise trucks, aviation, and shipping faces the same challenge. Todts describes the FuelEU Maritime and the ReFuelEU Aviation regulations as “breakthroughs” that show how the EU has accepted the need to lead change in these high-polluting sectors, but again, he insists on the need to “accelerate” the development of e-fuels.

The speed of the transition on the ground is likewise “hugely worrying” in the buildings sector, despite reducing energy for heating and cooling buildings being “a clear priority” of the Green Deal, says Adrian Joyce, director of the Renovate Europe campaign.

“If EU policy-makers are serious about the renovation wave, they must give buildings and efficiency measures much more attention in the next five years,” argues Joyce. “The EU and member states must work together to speedily implement the solutions set out in the Euro-

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pean Buildings Directive, to fund deep renovations and set up one-stop-shops, in conjunction with the private sector, to allow people wanting to energy renovate their homes to easily find reliable information.”

More than simply focusing on legislation, Joyce suggests policy-makers need to start thinking differently if the aims of the Green Deal are really to be achieved. “Policy-makers and the general public are, by and large, stuck in a 20th-century way of thinking about energy,” he comments. “They remain focused on big, centralised energy production and see efficiency measures as deprivation, a sacrifice, rather than as a solution that ultimately reduces energy bills, creates quality jobs, and improves people’s quality of life.”

## SOCIAL GAPS

On the much-promised social aspects of the European Green Deal, the EU has yet to get started, let alone speed up, suggests Ludovic Voet, who leads on climate and the just transition for the European Trade Union Confederation. The initiative so far has “completely overlooked the social impacts and does not really enshrine the just transition”. Europe’s trade unions are calling for a “just transition framework at the EU level” to “complement the Green Deal”. The EU’s current actions remain “too limited to carbon-intensive regions and jobs” and fall well short of acting as “tools to transform the world of work”, says Voet.

He outlines a series of policies that would be included in such a framework, such as a “granular mapping” for each climate policy showing its impact on skills and jobs in each region and each sector. Changes could then be anticipated, and the necessary discussions initiated with employees. The just transition also needs more financing, and workers need to participate in discussions around transition pathways. “A risk of the green transition” is that older workers are not retrained and are replaced in 10 years, when targets need to be met, by “younger, less well-paid workers”.

Without such steps, Voet suggests that European politicians should not be surprised by any “backlash” against the Green Deal.

In a similar vein, Climate Action Network Europe’s Röhrig says the money to cushion the social impacts of extending the EU carbon tax to domestic heating and transport, the Social Climate Fund, was a “useful first step” in “better integrating social cohesion into the green transformation”. Yet the fund is just too small and “clearly insufficient to tackle deeper structural issues related to poverty eradication and prevention”, he says.

“Political pressure surrounding the cost of living crisis” must not, however, “result in a slowdown of the climate policy agenda,” argues Röhrig. Such a push would be misguided: “Insufficient action against the climate emergency will lead to even more significant social disruptions, negatively impacting health and resilience particularly among already marginalised groups.”

Perhaps most important to maintaining and increasing the success of the Green Deal is the need to clarify how all this change will be financed post-2026 when the current EU budget and the NextGenerationEU funding ends.

“We need investment if we want member states to implement the Green Deal, and many countries will not have the fiscal space to do so alone,” underlines Todts, calling for a “long-

term investment plan” with a horizon of five to 10 years. “If there is investment, money, jobs, we will be on the right track,” he concludes.

In short, the European Green Deal has made remarkable progress since its announcement, staying the course through the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the energy crisis. But crucial areas like agriculture remain politically explosive and largely untouched. After 2024, the Green Deal will need to move from regulation and targets to the much trickier phase of using industrial policies, social policy, and public investment to ensure continued success.



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# *Europe's Polywar: Ukraine on the Frontline of Peaceful Unity*

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Could EU enlargement, combined with an acknowledgement of its imperialist heritage and the introduction of Europe-wide common citizenship, put an end to warring nation-states?

**E**nlargement of the European Union resurfaced on the geopolitical horizon in 2022. The accession of aspiring countries was back on the agenda out of dire necessity when Russia escalated its war on Ukraine. Military assaults on the Ukrainian state also threatened a united Europe, and war wounds both instil a sense of urgency and evoke phantasms intended to soothe the unbearable pain.

Since then, various other international conflicts have impacted the EU to its east and south. From Azerbaijan's military seizure of Armenian-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh to renewed tension between Serbia and Kosovo, coup upheavals in the Sahel, and an all-out Israeli-Palestinian war, disparate armed clashes have coalesced over the past year, creating a warfare belt around the EU. A polywar has absorbed pre-existing tensions and spawned new ones.

While some Western voices profess that Ukraine is not grateful enough for the support it has received to protect itself and repel its invaders, the reality is quite the opposite. Ukrainian resistance has so far contained Russian aggression within its borders, allowing EU countries to continue living in peace. On a political level, Ukraine's self-defence has been hugely advantageous to European unity.

The EU project is up against a surge of the extreme right in the run-up to crucial elections both inside the bloc and across the world. With a fascist resurgence looming, threatening the survival of a united Europe, the politics of enlargement should be considered as a means to sustain the project. When perceived not just as a technocratic procedure with a set of institutional requirements (which will inevitably be needed too) but also as Europe's re-foundational process, enlargement will ensure that the EU embraces what its current incarnation is badly lacking.

The EU's major and most challenging problem underpins its very creation: war. Conceived as a unifying post-war project, to borrow Tony Judt's famous description, the EU took "never again" as its guiding principle. However, unlike the universal appeal of Käthe Kollwitz's artwork on the human



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condition in war, in practice the EU supposes that "it should never happen again to us". Such beginnings have defined a reactive *modus operandi* within EU politics that is incapable of acting ahead, is constantly belated, and barely catches up with actual developments.

The EU is facing a military puzzle. It has no experience of existing without NATO – in other words, the US – and its nuclear umbrella, and yet its most urgent task is to make a functioning enlarged Union possible, transforming a post-war project into a "pre-war" one. To date, it has not managed to develop a proactive, efficient mechanism capable of preventing wars not only inside but also beyond its borders, wherever a renewed EU could reach out and apply political pressure. Outside, neighbouring armed combat is a guarantee of political cracks from within, and if Russia's war conduct is not disrupted by international efforts, today's liberal political forces across Europe will soon find themselves deeply opposed, contemplating how great the idea of a united Europe had been.

The second issue decisive for Europe's future is dealing with an imperial past and its persistent legacies. The EU must stop pretending it is a coalition of nation-states that got together

in mutual understanding for peaceful cooperation. Instead, it needs to acknowledge that, by its very nature, a united Europe is a post-imperial project, which became possible only after the demise of European empires. So far, the EU has cautiously addressed colonialism only on soft territory, through culture and the arts. While the rest of the world, particularly the so-called Global South, is foremost and unavoidably looking at Europe through a postcolonial lens, the issue has not seriously entered internal *realpolitik*.

Recognising the EU as an entity with imperialist heritage is also highly instructive for the Russian case – only the empire's military defeat and subsequent collapse can bring about progressive post-imperial change. Besides, the Union combines both former empires and colonised countries, some of which have entwined histories. This fundamental dimension of the EU's heritage will become even more significant should it expand east and south, as its historical depth will grow. Thoroughly tackling uneradicated colonialism is a reliable remedy for honourable interrelations and effective interdependence in the future.

A third prerequisite for accomplishing the European project concerns citizenship. For a renewed, expanded

EU model to deal with new global challenges, its juridical rationale has to be revised and reaffirmed on an all-European basis. Establishing a common European citizenship would, in effect, create the first international democracy in history, overcoming the limits of the nation-state.

The absence of prospects for a common citizenship predestined the historic failure of the European Constitution almost twenty years ago. If a polity aims at constituting democratic power over certain territories, people throughout must be legally referred to as equal citizens – *civitas*, or government politics, should go hand in hand with *civitas*, or citizens united by law. Establishing a common European citizenship for peoples of diverse origin from different European countries would not only be a revolutionising moment of EU enlargement changing the entire continent but also a determinative step towards putting a real end to the war logic gradually absorbing Eastern Europe.

With the notion of "never" being irretrievably lost, this might be the only way for Europe to stop today's endless refrain of war, sounding just like bombardments – again, and again, and again. ■

# THE WOMEN OF VENTOTENE

ARTICLE BY  
ANTONIA FERRI

While their names are not as widely known as those of the male authors of the *Ventotene Manifesto*, women played a decisive role in the development and dissemination of European federalist thought. A conversation with historian Antonella Braga reconstructs the link between the personal lives and political involvement of Europe’s “female founders”.

One has intelligent eyes and her hair pulled up; the other is tall, with dark hair, mocking eyes, and a strong independent streak. They are Ursula Hirschmann, a Jewish German intellectual, and Ada Rossi, an Italian anti-fascist militant. Their objective is a federal Europe, and the end of what Ada calls the “radical evil”: war.

Conventional history remembers these two women mainly as wives, Ada of Ernesto Rossi and Ursula of Altiero Spinelli (and before that, of the anti-fascist Eugenio Colorni), the authors of the *Ventotene Manifesto*. But the story of the *Manifesto*, written in 1941 with the title *For a Free and United Europe* and regarded as one of the foundational texts of the European Union, is not only one of men.

In fact, Ada Rossi and Ursula Hirschmann, free to travel to and from the island of Ventotene, where their husbands were being held captive by the Fascist regime, were the ones who brought the *Manifesto* to the Italian mainland, and from there to Europe.

Here, despite the threat of repression that they had already experienced in the past, they distributed copies of the *Manifesto* and began to spread European federalist ideals, born of the experience of Nazi-fascist resistance, to create a common political, economic, and social framework that would guarantee peace.

Hirschmann translated the text into German to distribute it to the anti-Nazi resistance movement. In Bergamo, Rossi had the text typed up by partisan Mimma Quarti, and distributed it in anti-fascist circles and universities. This clandestine act resulted in her arrest and confinement, and separation from her beloved Ernesto until August 1943, when she was released.

## THE PRIVATE IS POLITICAL

“In those years among the women committed to the federalist movement, there was surely awareness of the need to also fight a gender battle,” explains Antonella Braga, an expert in the European anti-fascist and federalist movement. “But it was a question that came later. At that moment, the priority was to defeat Nazi-fascism and make a new Europe and in this, the role of women existed and was important.”

Hirschmann and Rossi were not considered to be co-authors of the *Manifesto*, and in contrast to the Germans Hilda Monte and Anna Siemens, they did not play a direct role in its theoretical elaboration. Their most important contribution to the anti-fascist and federalist cause was centred on distribution: “They acted as connecting officers, like postal workers, or, as the Communists called them, ‘flamingos’.”

Nevertheless, both actively participated in the exchange of ideas. In a letter to her husband Ernesto, Ada wrote that in the first draft of

the *Manifesto* she found fundamental themes that they often discussed, such as “the horror of war, the demonic face of nationalism, and the project for a federalist Europe”, in addition to the foundations for socialist, liberal reform.

Their dedication to the cause and the solidity of their interior ideal did not waver, even in the face of private lives full of responsibility. Women’s political commitment and the history of federalist movements are intertwined with personal lives, friendships, passions, and love stories. Hirschmann had three children from her first marriage with Eugenio Colorni, and another three from her relationship with Altiero Spinelli, whom she met in Ventotene.

Colorni was also confined on the island, and it was her relationship with him, passionate as much as it was tormented, that led to her participating in the discussions that preceded the writing of the *Manifesto*. Colorni is not listed among the authors, but once he returned to Rome, he became the first editor of the text.

The circle of friends that was created around the *Manifesto* and its authors gave way to the European Federalist Movement, founded on 27 to 28 August 1943 in the home of the Waldensian anti-fascist Mario Alberto Rollier in Milan. Subsequently, federalists from Italy, France, Germany, and all over Europe joined the movement, drawing their inspiration for a united, federalist Europe from Nazi-fascist

WOMEN'S POLITICAL  
 COMMITMENT AND  
 THE HISTORY OF FEDERALIST  
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oppression and the horrors of the World Wars.

Rollier's anti-fascist circle included the Spinelli siblings, Gigliola and Cerilo, as well as Altiero, freed from Ventotene, and Eugenio Colorni. His final break up from Hirschmann came about in Milan, where she consolidated her relationship with Spinelli. The group also included Ada Rossi and the writer, painter, and militant Luisa Villani Usellini, who became involved with Colorni and later followed him to Rome. Even though not very well known, Usellini left significant marks in the political and social circles she participated in, explains Braga.

## DEDICATION AND DISAPPOINTMENT

These romantic relationships reveal a human side to the anti-fascist political movements of the postwar period, and in this sense, they go beyond gossip. The private lives of the proponents of a united Europe also reflect their political stature and the emotional consequences of the losses and tribulations inflicted by the regimes and their wars.

This is even truer for the women of federalism. For the sake of Ernesto, nihilistic and often suffering from depression, Ada Rossi renounced having children even though she wanted them, and did all she could to create a serene family environment, surrounded by caring people.

This difficult private situation was compounded by the disappointment felt

regarding the failure of the federalist project when, following the war, a Europe of nations took shape, divided into two opposing blocs based on the imperialist powers of the Cold War.

Hirschmann and Usellini experienced similar disappointments. In March 1945, Hirschmann, as Spinelli's partner, contributed to organising the International Conference of European Federalists in Paris, which was also attended by Albert Camus and George Orwell. For years, Hirschmann was the secretary of the Roman branch of the Federalist movement, and she stayed by the side of Altiero despite repeated failures in the attempt to build a European political union.

The last years of Hirschmann's life also demonstrated her feminist side. "There is a beautiful story that I discovered in the private archives of Luisa Villani Usellini. It was a note that Ursula Hirschmann sent to Luisa, saying: 'Take care of Eugenio'," says Braga. She understood that there was more than a simple friendship between Usellini and her first husband.

As for Usellini, Braga describes her as an active partisan in the fight against fascism and a point of reference for many other women. During the war, her tasks were providing connections, political training, and the production and dis-

tribution of clandestine press. From July 1944 to March of the following year, she directed *La Donna Socialista* [The Socialist Woman], a biweekly supplement to the Roman socialist newspaper *Avanti!*. “When she began her life with Colorni, Usellini experienced an important moment of independence and emancipation from her former husband [the anti-fascist screenwriter and writer Guglielmo Usellini], who had sometimes limited her as a woman.” When Guglielmo was released from prison, Luisa remained in Rome instead of following him to Switzerland.

Together with Colorni, Usellini entered a period of political activism that led to her federalist commitment, born after reading the *Ventotene Manifesto*, where “the war was not presented as an unavoidable fatality, but as the consequence of the international anarchy and division of Europe into sovereign nations”, explains Braga.

Usellini had a tireless sense of duty. After her husband’s incarceration, she wrote in her diary, “There’s really not much left to write, it’s time to see what I can do.” Her tenacity did not waver even after the sudden death of Colorni, which pained her greatly. Seriously injured during a fascist attack by the Banda Koch, an anti-partisan militia known for its violence and cruelty, Colorni died on 30 May 1944, just five days before the liberation of Rome and almost a year before the liberation of Milan on 25 April 1945.

While Ernesto Rossi, Spinelli, and Hirschmann continued to pursue the federalist ideal from their exile in Geneva, Usellini found herself in a liberated Rome. “Rome experienced a sort of advance post-war period, and the militants felt the need to return to dedicating themselves to the political battle through the parties they belonged to. Usellini therefore felt disappointed and abandoned by her former companions.” Although she was a socialist, Usellini was above all a federalist who believed in the urgent need to create a Europe made for people and not for nations.

In this she stood in contrast with the Partito Socialista di Unità Proletaria (Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity, PSIUP), which, in the new bipolar world, was moving nearer to the Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party, PCI). “She then understood, having seen it up close, that the Anglo-Americans had no intentions of embracing federalism”, explains Braga. Together with Veniero Spinelli, Altiero’s brother, and his wife Ingrid Warburg, Usellini established the Movimento Autonomista di Federazione Europea (European Federation Autonomist Movement, MAFE).

“The MAFE was aligned to French federalist thinking and envisioned a global revolution that would overtake many different sectors: political, social, cultural, and also religious. It was a radical federalist project. The idea was a revolution that would develop on various

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levels, starting from the bottom in municipalities, then leading to a series of regional federations, a European federation, and finally a global federation.”

With greater ambitions came greater disappointments, however. Even so, Usellini’s experience allows us to understand how the idea of federalism from the top down through the institution of a national power converges with federalism from the bottom up, which builds on a system of local autonomies. These two approaches together form the ideal of a political power that reduces the centrality of nations. “It is an original project that was somehow betrayed. A project that did not require the death of the nation-state, but the sharing of sovereignty on several levels of government.”

## UNITY AS EMANCIPATION

This tension is still at play in today’s Europe. “The upcoming European elections are fundamental. We must make people understand that we need to take a step towards a pathway of political unification, legitimised by a constitution, or otherwise Europe risks becoming diluted into an area of free exchange that will slowly come apart.”

Spinelli, Ada and Ernesto Rossi, Hirschmann, Usellini, Colorni and all the other European federalists cherished an ideal that would have led to the end of all wars. Internal disagreements took a place in the background.

“These federalist women had profoundly independent political ideals, and they acknowledged value in their political commitments. Today, gender battles are often aimed at affirmation at an economic level. Instead, these women took a front-line role in political activism at a time when this was not easy for women.”

Hirschmann continued to be politically active until she suffered a severe stroke in early 1976. A year prior she had founded the association

Femmes pour l'Europe [Women for Europe]. "She understood that building a Europe that was above all founded on rights and liberty meant women would have an even better possibility of emancipation."

In the 1970s, Hirschmann tried to engage those feminist movements that were both opposed to bourgeois society and hostile to the European project in the federalist cause. She wanted these two worlds, which did not speak the same language, to find common ground. She did not consider herself Italian, German, or Jewish, but one of the "uprooted with nothing to lose but our chains in a united Europe". "And therefore," she wrote, "we are federalists."

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# "EUROWHITENESS"

## EUROPE'S CIVILISATIONAL TURN

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AN INTERVIEW WITH  
HANS KUNDNANI

From migration to foreign policy, the once outward-looking EU has turned defensive. External influences are framed as civilisational threats not only by far-right politicians but also by pro-European voices. This identitarian shift is reviving the link between Europe and whiteness, which was sidelined in the integration process after World War II but never properly addressed.

**GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL:** In your book *Eurowhiteness*, you discuss Europe's civilisational turn. What do you mean by that? When did it begin, and when did it become apparent?

**HANS KUNDNANI:** It is not entirely clear when it began. It may not even be apparent now, at least to a lot of people. I started thinking about the civilisational turn around 2020 and 2021. But in retrospect, the critical juncture was the refugee crisis in 2015.

In the two decades between the end of the Cold War and 2010, the EU had been in expansive, offensive mode. It was optimistic and outward-looking, and imagined a world that could almost be remade in its own image. The phrase that captures this best is the title of a book by Mark Leonard of the European Council on Foreign Relations, *Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century*. This hubristic, optimistic period came to an end with the eurozone crisis, the Arab Spring in 2011, and then the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Europe begins to see itself as being on the defensive.

So the change is already there in the first half of the 2010s, but then with the refugee crisis in 2015, this defensiveness takes on a different shape. Not only does the EU see itself as being surrounded by threats but, after 2015, it also perceives these threats in civilisational terms.

That's the civilisational turn, when threats are no longer seen in an ideological way or in a geopolitical or realist way, but in the context of a Huntingtonian "clash of civilisations", as threats against a European civilisation that must be protected.

**Your book argues that what underlies this turn is "Eurowhiteness". What is Eurowhiteness and where does the term come from?**

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I borrow this term from József Böröcz, an American sociologist. He uses the phrase in a very particular way to discuss the internal hierarchy within what he calls the "structure of whiteness". He differentiates, roughly, Western Europeans from Central and Eastern Europeans and Southern Europeans, who have an aspirational desire to become fully white. I use it in a slightly different way. I distinguish between ethnic/cultural versions of European identity on the one hand, and civic versions on the other. This draws on theories of nationalism, which distinguish between ethnic/cultural nationalism and civic nationalism, and applies it to read what I call "regionalism", in other words, to Europe.

For me, Eurowhiteness is an ethnic/cultural idea of Europe. My argument is that there are both ethnic/cultural and civic currents of ideas of Europe going back to the Enlightenment at least. In particular, I talk about Eurowhiteness

to suggest that Europe and whiteness have something to do with each other, which is sort of obvious when you think about it, though it's not something people want to talk about. The idea of a post-war European identity, centred on the EU, is one that a lot of pro-Europeans want to believe has nothing to do with whiteness. But I argue that the ethnic/cultural version of European identity persisted after World War II, and influenced and informed European integration itself.

**So the EU's civilisational turn might have become more evident in the last few years, but it has not replaced or superseded more civic understandings of Europe. It's been present throughout.**

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Ethnic/cultural ideas of Europe go back to the medieval period, when Europe was synonymous with Christendom, and what it meant to be European was basically synonymous with being Christian. In the modern period, starting with the Enlightenment, there was the beginning of a civic idea of what Europe is. From then on, both the ethnic/cultural and the civic currents are present and interact in some very complex ways. In the post-World War II period, pro-Europeans like to think that the ethnic/cultural element of European identity went away, and it probably did lose some salience. But what is shocking is that it is now having a resurgence.

### In which of today's EU policies do you see the civilisational turn?

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It's most visible in migration policy. Since 2015, Europe has in effect been building a wall in the Mediterranean. In other words, it's not that different from the policy that Trump pursued while he was US president, except that, instead of a land border with Mexico, it's a sea border with North Africa. Human Rights Watch says that EU migration policy can be summarised in three words: "Let them die." Since 2014, 28,000 people have died in the Mediterranean. More than 2000 so far in 2023. The Mediterranean is the deadliest border in the world.

Since Ursula von der Leyen became European Commission president in 2019, there's been a European Commissioner for "promoting our European way of life". It was originally for "protecting our European way of life". There was a stupid argument in the European Parliament about that verb, but the real problem is not the verb but the phrase "our European way of life". The job of the Commissioner for Promoting our European Way of Life is, at least in part, to keep migrants out. It makes it very explicit that migration is not just a difficult policy problem to manage but a threat to the European way of life.

This language of civilisation is also creeping into European foreign policy. The far right tends to bang on about the threat to European civilisation from migration, but the centre right increasingly uses the same language to discuss European foreign policy. In all the debates about European sovereignty, strategic autonomy, and a geopolitical Europe, there's this real sense that Europe needs to defend itself from threats perceived in civilisational terms. The key figure here is France's President Emmanuel Macron. Macron is a politician who first started on the centre left in Hollande's government and now is a centre-right or radical-centrist politician who explicitly talks about defending European civilisation. My fear is that the far right and the centrists are increasingly thinking in the same way.

IT'S EASIER  
TO DENY THAT  
RACISM  
IS A PROBLEM  
IF NO DATA  
IS POINTING TO  
DISADVANTAGE

**Do you think that the associations between the idea of Europe and the European project and whiteness prevent ethnic minorities from identifying with EU politics?**

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I'm not sure, and a big part of what the book is trying to do is just to put some of these issues on the table. For the UK, which is the country that I know best, the picture is fairly clear empirically. Anecdotally, but also based on academic research and data, it's clear that non-white Brits identify with Europe even less than white Brits do.

My father was Indian and my mother is Dutch. But, even in my case, I find it more difficult to identify as European than I think a lot of white Brits do. When I was working for a European think tank, some of my colleagues would say, "I'm a proud European," or, "I'm 100 per cent European." And that's fine, but I couldn't do that. After all, I'm also part Asian, right? Similarly, if you're black, you're going to say, "Well, I'm part African, right? I can't be completely European."

Now, what does that mean in practice? If you're a non-white person growing up in France, are you less likely to identify with a European project than with France? Intuitively, I would probably say yes. But I don't know the answer to that, and one of the reasons that we can't say for sure is that, as far as continental Europe goes, there's such a lack of data.

**Many European countries do not have any data on race or ethnic minorities. France doesn't recognise the idea of race officially. Germany even wanted to remove the mention of race from the constitution, even though it was a clause protecting people from racial discrimination. Why are so many European countries so uncomfortable with the idea of race?**

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Different things are going on here. In simple terms, the reason France opposes it has to do with its Republican tradition of *laïcité*. In the case of Germany, though this is obviously a bit reductive, because it associates

those types of ethnic categories with Nazism. But in both cases, the history of their political culture means that they have an in-built resistance to collecting data on race and therefore racial discrimination. That would be the more charitable explanation. The more cynical explanation is that they want to deny that racism is a problem. It's easier to deny that racism is a problem if no data is pointing to disadvantage.

**Discussions of race inevitably lead back to colonialism. In the immediate decades after World War II, the founding members of the EU were all white European empires who banded together as they were losing their colonies. Why is the post-imperial part of the EU's origin story often forgotten?**

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Again, there is an empathetic answer and a more cynical one. Let me start with the cynical answer. The EU has mythologised itself partly as a conscious strategy of what I call “region-building”, which is analogous to nation-building in the 19th century. The myth tends to be a comforting, positive story about your history that ignores some of the realities. After the colonial histories of France or the Netherlands had come to an end, they consigned it to a “memory hole”, as historian Tony Judt puts it.<sup>1</sup> They kind of moved on and tried to forget a painful, difficult history of humiliation. Colonialism was something that they just wanted to move on from.

But I have a slightly different and less cynical interpretation of why it gets forgotten. From the 1960s onwards, the Holocaust started to become a central collective memory within the EU and for pro-Europeans. Tony Judt writes that Holocaust recognition is “our contemporary European entry ticket”. The disconnect between the memory of the Holocaust and the forgetting of colonialism is striking, and I would argue that there's a structural dimension to that disconnect.

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1 Tony Judt (2005). *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*. London: Penguin Press.

IF YOU TAKE  
ECONOMIC  
POLICY OUT,  
WHAT DO  
YOU HAVE  
LEFT OTHER  
THAN CULTURE?

The Holocaust and the Second World War fit very neatly into the existing narrative of the EU as a peace project. This is a story that pro-Europeans tell about what the EU has done, from the Schuman plan to overcoming the centuries of conflict between France and Germany that culminated in World War II. What that story does is to encourage Europeans to think about their histories almost exclusively in relation to each other. It is the history of Europe as an internal story of how European countries interacted with each other in which the rest of the world is completely forgotten. The external lessons of European history, what Europeans did to the rest of the world, but also conversely the influence that the rest of the world had on Europe, in particular Africa and the Middle East, are erased.

Thinking about European history as a closed system brings Europeans together. It allows them to think of themselves as a "community of fate". But when you start to bring in the history of European colonialism, it has almost the opposite effect. It starts to pull Europeans apart. For example, France has to think about its history in Algeria, West and Central Africa, and Indochina [today's Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam]. If you start to think of your history as being part of a different community of fate, that of your former colonies, you have a responsibility to them. In the same way that pro-Europeans want to think that Germans have a responsibility to France, engaging with the history of colonialism encourages Europeans to think in terms of alternative communities of fate. The risk, from a pro-European point of view, is that these histories are a centrifugal force.

**The history is even more complicated if you factor in Central and Eastern Europe or other countries such as Ireland, for that matter.**

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At a stretch, you could think about a collective Western European project of reparations. You could imagine, in theory at least, a collective European project of reparations between Western European countries such as France, Belgium, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, and others. After all, we tend to think of European colonialism as a competitive project

between different European nations, but it was also cooperative in many ways. The problem is that Central and Eastern Europeans look at their history in a completely different way. They see themselves as victims, certainly of imperialism, some would even claim colonialism. So even if you could get Western European countries to agree, and I think we're a long way from that, Central and Eastern European countries look at this in such a different way that I think it's hard to imagine the EU, as a whole, undertaking any kind of project of reparations.

### **Is there a link between Eurowhiteness and Europe's democratic deficit?**

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What the EU does, roughly, is depoliticisation. It takes policy, in particular economic policy, out of the space of democratic contestation. At the outset, that was the genius of the European project, because depoliticising coal and steel policy made war between France and Germany materially impossible, as Robert Schuman said. As the project went further, however, depoliticisation started to become a problem from a democratic perspective. Economic policy ought to be the centre of democratic contestation, but it was removed from that space – and if you take economic policy out, what do you have left other than culture?

In the ebb and flow between a civic idea of Europe and an ethnic/cultural idea, the civic idea dominated in the long period between the

loss of European colonies in the 1960s and the beginning of the eurozone crisis in 2010. This civic idea was centred on the social market economy and the depoliticised mode of governance that European integration produced. Since the financial crisis, however, that model of the social market economy and the welfare state has been hollowed out by neoliberalism. Meanwhile, there has been a backlash against the EU's depoliticised mode of governance, which first became apparent in the referendums over the Maastricht Treaty and later the Constitutional Convention.

The result is that gradually over the last few decades, it's become increasingly difficult to say that Europe stands for the social market economy, the welfare state, and depoliticised governance. That's the moment when pro-Europeans began to reach for a cultural definition of what Europe is. The European way of life no longer refers to the social market economy or its mode of governance; now it is about protecting European citizens from Islam or Islamism.

### **Do you think that the the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has also been responded to in civilisational terms?**

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I think it is fairly clear that the war has been framed in quite a civilisational way. The contrast between how Ukrainian refugees and refugees from other parts of the world are treated is very striking. At the beginning of

A POWERFUL EUROPE WITH  
 A COHERENT, EFFECTIVE  
 EUROPEAN FOREIGN  
 POLICY DOESN'T HAVE  
 TO BE A GREAT CIVILISATION

the war, von der Leyen said, "Ukraine belongs to us." That language would never be used about Algeria, Morocco, or Syria. I also think that Russia is being constructed as a civilisational "other" against which Europe defines itself, and there's a long history to that idea.

There are other ways to look at the war though: in a realist way or even an ideological, neoconservative way – that is, as part of a global struggle between democracy and authoritarianism. Purist neoconservatives genuinely believe that every country in the world could become a democracy. It is what led to their recklessness in Iraq. You might disagree with them, but it is still not a civilisational framing.

**Is it possible to separate supporting, say, European sovereignty from exclusionary discourses? Can you not support European strategic autonomy and maybe even a European army without slipping into defending racist border policies?**

It absolutely is possible, which is why I am making these arguments. I am sceptical of ideas of European sovereignty and a geopolitical Europe, but for other reasons. What I am trying to do is to get those pro-Europeans who do believe in these things to be more careful about how they talk about it.

There are at least two alternative ways of thinking about a geopolitical Europe, and there may

be others too. The first is very realist. In a world of great power competition, Europe also needs to be a continental great power alongside China, the United States, Russia, and so on. It might be hard for pro-Europeans to think in that way because it requires them to abandon the high moral ground, the pro-European moral superiority as it were. But there is nothing wrong with that realist framing.

There is also an ideological framing free of ethnic, religious, or civilisational connotations. This is an argument about the global struggle between authoritarianism and democracy, which hawkish people in the UK and US think about. I don't agree with that reading, but at least the civilisational element is absent. A powerful Europe with a coherent, effective European foreign policy doesn't have to be a great civilisation.

**There has been an effort in green politics in recent years to think about place, territory, and even rootedness while avoiding the "blood and soil" dangers of such discourse. You can find it in Latour's writing about a new political spectrum or the efforts of the German Greens to redefine the notion of *Heimat*. Can you do that without falling into the racist or civilisational way of thinking about the world?**

I appreciate that you acknowledge this danger in green politics because a lot of people do not.

For example, right-wing ecology in Germany goes back to the Romantic movement in the 19th century and was present in the early phase of the German Greens.

But the question that I've been asking myself in the last few years is: as the climate crisis gets more acute and climate change moves up the political agenda, will it overcome the fault lines in our politics – in other words, will a new consensus emerge – or will it somehow deepen those fault lines? So far at least, climate change seems to be getting sucked into our culture wars.

You are talking about roots in connection to soil, to the climate and the environment. I'm quite sceptical about the idea of roots in general and my thinking here comes from debates about race. [Cultural studies scholars] Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy would say that we need to talk less about "roots" and more about "routes". In other words, it is not about trying to go back to something or somewhere. It is about humanity, and yourself as an individual, being on a journey. I love that idea.

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# UNIVERSAL BASIC SERVICES

## A GREENER, MORE AFFORDABLE LIFE FOR ALL

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ARTICLE BY

**ANNA COOTE &  
SEBASTIAN MANG**

In the upcoming European elections, politicians face two crucial questions: addressing the climate emergency and alleviating the cost of living crisis. There is no single solution, but one strategy could make a big difference: concentrating on what people really need to live decent lives. By focusing on well-financed, sustainable, and affordable collective action, such as improving public transport, local renewable energy projects, and universal childcare, we can make green and affordable living available to all.

**T**he European Green Deal is the EU's response to the growing need for climate action. Introduced in 2019 to much fanfare, it falls short in terms of the speed of emission reductions, the energy and material requirements to meet growing demand, and public investments to meet climate targets. Crucially, it also lacks a strong social dimension.

By relying on regulation and making polluting activities more expensive without the backing of vital investments so that everyone can access cost-saving and green solutions, climate policy risks becoming regressive. This effect is exacerbated by the increasing cost of living and rising interest rates. Addressing our current crises through, for example, speeding up the adoption of renewables and improving the quality and affordability of public transport has become more expensive.

Progressives must now give priority to developing this social dimension, addressing voters' everyday experiences by delivering life's essentials through collective action.

While environmental regulation is important, a socially just climate agenda requires smarter public investment. It is time for progressives to reject the outdated logic of fiscal rules currently being discussed. They are a major hurdle to speeding up the transition as they limit the role governments can play in investing, shaping markets, and providing sustainable public goods.

Universal basic services can tackle both inequality and the climate crisis. It is a policy programme aimed at meeting everyone's basic needs within environmental limits. The goal cannot be reached by individuals acting alone, but only through collective action: more and better public services, investment of public funds, and regulation in the public interest.

The scientists at the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have reported a "high level of agreement" that "development targeted to basic needs and well-being for all entails less carbon-intensity than GDP-focused growth". It calls for changes that "reinforce sufficiency and emphasis on solidarity, economies built around care, livelihood protection, collective action, and basic service provision, linked to reduced emissions".

There is broad agreement about what people need to make their lives possible and worthwhile: a home to live in, nourishing food, qual-

ity education, people to look after us when we cannot look after ourselves, healthcare when we are ill, clean air and water, domestic energy, transport to take us where we need to go, access to the internet and – fundamentally – a sustainable environment.

These core necessities apply to just about everyone across the world, as well as to future generations. How they are met will vary widely between countries, cultures, and time periods, and each area of need is bound to be met differently. Universal basic services offers a principled framework to guide policy and practice in every case.

## A NEEDS-BASED APPROACH

Universal basic services is part of an emerging body of ideas that challenges economic orthodoxy and offers a sustainable alternative. Neo-classical economics takes preference satisfaction to be the chief source of wellbeing. But, as [social policy scholar] Ian Gough points out, this lacks any logical, ethical, or practical justification in the age of the Anthropocene, "when the recognition of planetary boundaries requires limiting the satisfaction of endless desires". It is time for a "different value standard, one of sufficiency or enough", defined as "the space above the floor of necessity but below the ceiling of excess".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ian Gough (2023). "Sufficiency as a Value Standard: From Preferences to Needs". *Ethics, Policy & Environment*. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZEMy>>.

UNIVERSAL BASIC  
SERVICES CAN  
TACKLE BOTH  
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THE CLIMATE  
CRISIS

Basic needs, unlike preferences, are intrinsically satiable. Universal basic services is a needs-based approach that brings together the goals of universalism and sufficiency – enough for all, now and in the future. It plays a key role in achieving a “safe and just space for humanity” and the closely related goal of sustainable “consumption corridors” between a social floor and an ecological ceiling.<sup>2</sup> It is about living well within limits.

The practical outcome is not a uniform spartan existence, but secure social and material foundations that enable everyone, not just the better-off, to enjoy the time, space, and opportunity to live a fulfilling life. The goal of sufficiency is closely related to the visions of luxury for all and public abundance. Rooted in collective action, shared purpose, and mutual aid, universal basic services generates value for all, rather than extracting it for a few.

## THE BASIS FOR A FAIR ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION

Current climate policies are market-based and tend to affect lower-income households more. Oxfam's analysis of carbon inequality shows at least part of the story.<sup>3</sup> Between 1990 and 2015, European low- and middle-income groups reduced their emissions, while the richest increased theirs. This pattern is set to continue: the extension of the Emissions Trading System to transport and domestic heating, which will be phased in over the coming years, will have a much bigger effect on low- and medium-income households than on the wealthiest, who will hardly notice the price increase and will consume no differently. The Social Climate Fund, which was proposed to ease these fears, will be too small to make a difference.

2 Kate Raworth (2018). *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*. London: Cornerstone.

3 Tim Gore, Mira Alestig (2020). *Confronting carbon inequality in the European Union*. Oxfam International. 8 December 2020. Available at <<https://bit.ly/ws/ZEMM>>.

CURRENT CLIMATE  
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MORE

Collective measures to meet human needs, notably universal basic services, can compensate for these regressive effects. Rising fuel duties or carbon pricing would take less of a toll on households' budgets if they could switch to decent, affordable public transport and shared mobility. If housing were managed in the public interest, the costs of retrofitting could be subsidised and shared so that they do not land most heavily on low-income households.

Public attitudes and patterns of behaviour are crucial for achieving environmental goals. All public services can influence these by demonstrating what is possible and encouraging and supporting different ways of doing things, discouraging behaviour that is harmful to the environment, and preventing people from being locked into unsustainable routines.

A decent public transport system will help reduce reliance on private cars, for example. Hospitals and schools can serve food that is sustainably produced and reduce, or even eliminate, meat from their meals. Childcare and education services can have a significant impact on the experience, awareness, and learning of future generations. Universal basic services promotes solidarity and supports a politics where collective action is central rather than marginal. It creates the favourable conditions needed for working together to safeguard the planet.

## BALANCING AND REDISTRIBUTING

The current approach to tackling rising inflation in the EU is centred on increasing central bank interest rates. This makes household, business, and state investment more expensive, so that jobs are lost and ultimately people have even less money to spend. But when, as now, inflation is driven by high fossil fuel prices and international trade pressures, raising interest rates does nothing to address the root causes of inflation.

Perversely, relying on interest rate rises to bring down inflation is making weaning off expensive fossil fuels and investing in renewables, electrifying transport, and social housing retrofits more expensive. It undermines future price stability by delaying the essential green investments that make energy cheaper in the medium term and protect us from fossil price shocks. Indeed, investors are ditching renewable energy funds at the fastest rate on record because clean energy shares have been severely impacted by higher interest rates.

Economist Isabella Weber<sup>4</sup> argues that today's inflation can be described as seller's inflation, whereby the "corporate sector manages to pass on a major cost shock to consumers by increasing prices to protect or enhance its profit margins". Rising corporate profits account for almost half the increase in Europe's inflation over the past two years, as companies increased prices by more than spiking costs of imported energy. Even prominent mainstream economist Paul Krugman<sup>5</sup> now agrees that inflation is a distributional conflict, while the International Monetary Fund argues that the inflation outlook depends on how corporate profits absorb wage gains.<sup>6</sup>

Instead of making things harder for people by raising interest rates, including for those investing in the transition, we should be taking a different path. After decades of stagnating real wages, we need to find a fair way out of this crisis by investing in collective action and taxing excessive profits. By decommodifying and democratising key sectors such as transport, childcare, and housing, governments have the potential to alleviate the cost of living crisis by directly reducing prices.

Implementing universal basic services would rebalance the economy, expanding resources for lower-income groups and constraining exces-

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4 Isabella M. Weber (2023). "Taking Aim at Sellers' Inflation". *Project Syndicate*. 13 July 2023. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZEDy>>.

5 Paul Krugman (2023). "The Football Game Theory of Inflation". *The New York Times*. 3 January 2023. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZEEy>>.

6 Niels-Jakob Hansen, Frederik Toscani, Jing Zhou (2023). "Europe's Inflation Outlook Depends on How Corporate Profits Absorb Wage Gains". *IMF Blog*. 26 June 2023. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZEFi>>.

GOVERNMENTS  
WILL NEED  
TO PLAY  
A BIGGER ROLE  
IN INVESTING  
IN PUBLIC  
GOODS  
AND SERVICES

sive consumption. Services that deliver life's essentials are "in-kind" benefits that represent a virtual income or "social wage". Analysis by the British London-based Institute for Fiscal Studies shows how a range of services (or "benefits in kind") substantially redistribute resources between lower and higher-income groups.<sup>7</sup>

By meeting needs collectively through services, rather than individually through market transactions, universal basic services enlarges the sphere of public consumption. Where services are provided directly by public institutions or by non-state organisations regulated by government, they are not commodities but public goods. They are subject to shared responsibility and democratic control; they can be made accessible to all and help prevent harm arising from unmet needs.

An international analysis of social provisioning concluded in 2021 that "public services are linked to higher need satisfaction and lower energy requirements".<sup>8</sup> The carbon footprint of healthcare in the United States, where the system is market-led, is three times greater per capita than that of several European countries where the system is wholly or partly controlled by the government.

Swift, intensive measures are necessary to prevent climate breakdown, and spreading their impact indiscriminately across income brackets would rapidly push the poorest below acceptable living standards. While decarbonisation efforts will eventually benefit lower-income groups, the gains would be too little, too late to avert a social catastrophe. Achieving net-zero emissions requires two integrated pathways: reducing aggregate emissions and decreasing inequality of income, wealth, and people's ability to meet their basic needs.

7 Kate Ogden, David Phillips (2023). "The distribution of public service spending". *IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities*. 31 May 2023. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZEFZ>>.

8 Jefim Vogel, Julia K. Steinberger, Daniel W. O'Neill, William F. Lamb, Jaya Krishnakumar (2021). "Socio-economic conditions for satisfying human needs at low energy use: An international analysis of social provisioning". *Global Environmental Change*, 69. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZEHE>>.

## UNLOCKING INVESTMENT IN EUROPE

To deliver universal basic services across Europe, governments will need to play a bigger role in investing in public goods and services. Germany's 9-euro public transport ticket initiative from the summer of 2022 is a great example of universal basic services in practice. It was hugely popular, with over 52 million tickets sold. However, years of underinvestment in the German train network meant that the quality of services has dropped. While programmes such as the climate ticket should be established across the continent in every country, they need to be backed up by quality investments.

This push will cost a lot of money, but inaction – or delayed action – would be more expensive. Moreover, the system cost of a transition from private petrol and diesel cars to electric vehicles would be significantly more expensive than a transition from private transport to public transport. Modelling by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) has shown that “high-quality, universal childcare provided free at the point of use is likely the highest-returning investment a government can make”.<sup>9</sup> NEF argues that the returns are so strong and dependable that investment could be funded through borrowing. We need a new way of thinking about public finance. First, the EU should move away from outdated fiscal rules. Recent NEF analysis showed that only four EU member states would be able to meet the estimated investment needed to bring their economies in line with the Paris climate agreement with current spending constraints in place.

According to an analysis by the European Trade Union Confederation,<sup>10</sup> the relatively indebted member states would need to make cuts of at least 45 billion euros next year if currently debated fiscal rules are implemented. Any restrictions on green and social public investments now would be extremely counterproductive, spelling missed opportunities

<sup>9</sup> Jeevun Sandher, Thomas Stephens (2023). “Investing in universal early years education pays for itself”. *New Economics Foundation*. 18 July 2023. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZElk>>.

<sup>10</sup> European Trade Union Confederation (2023). *EU Rules Require €45 Billion In Spending Cuts Next Year*. 24 May 2023. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZEKs>>.

to capitalise on the transition and astronomical costs to future public budgets from preventable climate disasters. Instead of arbitrary spending limits we need necessary investments in clever industrial policy and better green public infrastructure.

Second, public investment in universal basic services can readily be complemented by action on wealth inequality. Luxury consumption – for example second homes, multiple flights, and exotic holidays – accounts for a disproportionate amount of harmful emissions and resource depletion. Wealth taxes are part of the solution. A recent study by the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament showed that a wealth tax could generate 213 billion euros a year for EU member states.<sup>11</sup> To reduce aviation emissions, a frequent flyer levy could increase the tax on airline tickets after the first return flight.

## **BUILDING SUPPORT FOR A FAIR TRANSITION**

By setting out to meet everyone's basic needs, universal basic services paves the way to eliminating poverty and relieving miseries inflicted by insecurity. The experience of poverty and insecurity is today leaving people feeling hopeless, leading to resistance against environmental policies seen as more cuts and taxes. These feelings will intensify as new conflicts ratchet up fuel prices and extreme weather plays havoc with food supplies.

Investing in expanded and improved public services that deliver life's essentials would counteract these anxieties, enabling people to feel more satisfied with their daily lives and be more likely to trust their governments, local and national. Universal basic services could start to turn a downward spiral of poverty, distrust, and resistance into a virtuous circle of wellbeing, confidence, and support.

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<sup>11</sup> Silvia Pelegrín Marugán (2023). *Tax the Rich: From Slogan to Reality*. 15 May 2023. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZELv>>.

Without that support, democratic governments will find themselves no longer able to act to avert environmental catastrophe. As the UK Climate Change Committee has pointed out, “More than ever before, future emissions reductions will require people to be actively involved [...] Fairness is also fundamental to public support and must be embedded throughout policy. Only a transition that is perceived as fair, and where people, places and communities are well-supported, will succeed.”<sup>12</sup>

Europe faces a major challenge in reshaping its political economy for the coming decades. Universal basic services is not a silver bullet, but it has a big part to play. It offers a route to security and prosperity that improves the quality of life for all, not just for wage earners – an indispensable policy for a good life lived within planetary limits.



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<sup>12</sup> Committee on Climate Change (2020). *The Sixth Carbon Budget. The UK's path to Net Zero*. December 2020. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZEMj>>.



# FROM STRATEGIC AUTONOMY TO A NON-ALIGNED EUROPE

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ARTICLE BY  
**EDOUARD GAUDOT**

Collective identity built on a world view that no longer exists is vulnerable. Europe, despite its historical complexity and affluence, faces a post-Western turn in world dominance. Defence and energy plans, especially those brokered with authoritarian regimes, compromise the EU's plans for strategic autonomy. Could non-alignment be the way forward out of the EU's frequent political stalemates?

What is Europe?

For a European there is something almost intellectually and politically offensive about this question. Every map of the world found in European classrooms, newspaper offices, and ministries shows the same thing: the planet with Europe at its centre. In the eyes of Europeans – even when they malign it, even when they reject its current political form – Europe is something wonderfully unique. It is the continent of the Enlightenment, the civilisation that, over the centuries, birthed and nurtured democracy, liberty, equality, the sciences, humanism, modern values, and more.

Europe is the continent that united the globe through great discoveries, pioneering scientists, criminal colonisation, frenzied consumption of resources, global trade, and world wars. It is from Europe that white Christians sailed off to conquer lands that were only new to themselves. It is Europe that gave us modern ways of organising society into nation-states that jealously defend their borders, cultures, and sovereignty. Europe also wrote the rules that govern international relations between these entities. It is the old continent that, over the course of two centuries, dominated, organised, developed, and reshaped the world in its image.

But that was before.

Europe is no longer central. However, as long as the West remained on top, Europeans could delude themselves that they were major world players. Sheltering under the American nuclear umbrella, they could live their Kantian dream of perpetual peace and shared prosperity in their Community building “an ever closer union of peoples”. Europe’s wealth, historical complexity, and economic power could keep guaranteeing it a role on the world stage, despite the US’s dominant position as leader of the so-called “free” world. But that too was yesterday.

## **A POST-WESTERN WORLD**

After a decade of existential doubts and successive crises, the pandemic and the consequent realisation of vital strategic dependencies on global supply chains have further shaken the European Union’s certainties. Since Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, the tectonic shifts that slowly emerged as the Cold War ended have rapidly accelerated. In Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as in the Arab-Muslim world, deeply rooted cultural and political movements, the emergence of new economic powers, and the persistent and increasingly aggressive undermining of the existing global order by revisionist powers have forced Europe to confront a new reality: a post-Western world. At the United Nations General Assembly on 23 September 2023, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called it a “new world order”.

A collection of “emerging” powers is advancing an alternative vision for global power relations. China’s stated plan is to become the world’s greatest power by 2049, when it celebrates the centenary of the founding of the People’s Republic. Russian President Vladimir Putin states that he will no longer tolerate the junior role previously reserved for his nation. Breaking with the post-Cold War order, BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – have gradually evolved from informal strategic cooperation, aimed at strengthening their collective influence, to more or less concerted actions that challenge Western domination head on. These include, for example, destabilisation operations in regions historically overseen by Western powers such as the Sahel, where France has been on the receiving end of a formidable war of influence waged by Russia and its Wagner group proxies.

With 31.5 per cent of global GDP, BRICS nations carry more economic clout in 2023 than the G7 – a trend that will likely continue to accelerate in years to come as their economies grow. In 2015, BRICS nations set up the New Development Bank, an alternative to the World Bank and Western financial institutions, which finances infrastructure and development projects in member states and other emerging economies. Favouring transactions in local currencies, it aims to “dedollarise” the world economy.

A COLLECTION  
OF "EMERGING"  
POWERS IS  
ADVANCING  
AN ALTERNATIVE  
VISION FOR  
GLOBAL POWER  
RELATIONS

## THE "STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN DECLINE" PARADOX

With their calls for a "multipolar" world, BRICS nations are underlining how much, in their view, the multilateralism of previous decades was simply a hypocritical veil that poorly masked the domination of a single pole. The difficulties encountered by a pro-Ukraine West in rallying countries beyond the usual suspects to their cause is not evidence of a new bipolarisation – as US strategists, still animated by comforting Cold War reflexes, would have us believe – between democracies and autocracies. Rather, it marks a genuine position of non-alignment: prime examples being India and Brazil, who go to great pains to remain equidistant between Washington and Beijing.

As a result, everywhere from the world economy to far-off theatres of operation, the collective and individual influence of Europe and EU member states is waning. The EU's erratic position on the explosion of the horrific and ferocious Middle Eastern violence instigated on the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, when Hamas massacred Israeli civilians and Israel bombarded Gaza in response, is indicative of its marginalisation. The shambles surrounding the mooted unilateral suspension of European aid to Palestine, together with the EU Commission president's untimely display of unconditional support for the Israeli government, show how the EU may well be a *payer*, but it certainly is not a *player* in the region.

Even in relation to close neighbours, like Serbia, where soft power, aid programmes, and enlargement plans should guarantee a dominant influence, the EU is paying the price for its bureaucratic delays and political timidity while facing direct strategic competition from Beijing and Moscow, and sometimes also from oil-rich Gulf states and neo-Ottoman Turkey.

**THE EU IS PAYING THE PRICE  
FOR ITS BUREAUCRATIC  
DELAYS AND POLITICAL  
TIMIDITY**

However, this general decline presents a paradox. It comes at the very moment when the EU is repeatedly declaring its intention to develop strategic autonomy by finally breaking away from its complacent naivety towards partners turned rivals. But all the institutional literature on the Indo-Pacific, the relationship with China, and ties with Africa rather reveals that the shape and substance of this strategic autonomy remain incredibly vague. Other than some mixed success in ending certain economic and energy interdependencies, it is hard to tell where the EU intends to develop its autonomy – and quite what it means by this.

### **COMPROMISED DEFENCE AND ENERGY RELATIONS**

Instead, what we seem to be witnessing is a further cleaving of European nations to the American sphere of influence. Sweden and Finland, facing the threat of Russia, have decided to place their trust in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty rather than in Article 42(7) of the Treaty of the European Union, the EU's mutual defence clause. While the EU's energy security may have been wrested from the hands of Gazprom and the Kremlin, it is now heavily dependent on American liquified natural gas producers. Or it binds the EU to states with questionable foreign policy and human rights records. These include Qatar, which finances several terror groups, and Azerbaijan, which launched

a campaign to conquer and ethnically cleanse Nagorno-Karabakh of Armenians. The EU's energy deal compromised its ability to act against Azerbaijani violence, laying bare the inconsistency of its values-based foreign policy. Taking advantage of the new tune coming out of Brussels, Berlin, and Paris, the US is trying to persuade European allies to emulate its policy of decoupling from China with some success: the Netherlands had no choice but to adopt the American policy of restricting exports of semiconductors and strategic components to China.

Strategic uncertainty, which has grown significantly in recent years, remains largely unabated for Europeans. Relief at the change of administration in Washington in January 2021 proved short-lived. The Biden administration is certainly more polite than that of Donald Trump, whose return is now a serious possibility, but it defends American interests – whether economic, industrial, or military – with the same brutal realism. Biden's Inflation Reduction Act triggered some panicked reactions in the EU's ranks.

Diplomatic theatrics and hidden agendas within a complicated transatlantic relationship make it harder for the EU and its member states to hold their own in a world afflicted by more conflict and tensions than ever. The West's debacle in Afghanistan brings this home. As does Australia's sudden termination of its

submarine deal with France in favour of the US and UK AUKUS alliance, reminiscent of Cold War containment policies. War in Ukraine and conflict in the Middle East have successfully dragged a reluctant yet dominant US into theatres of operation; Europe, in both instances, has been brutally confronted by the limits of its traditional foreign policy tools, namely aid and international law.

In this volatile and threatening new strategic environment, which, insultingly for its partners, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy clumsily described as a "jungle" full of beasts, Europe is still struggling to find its way – and its voice. Having once bet on economic interdependencies to maintain peace in the world, the EU is now doing all it can to extract itself from these amidst general semantic confusion between "autonomy" and "self-sufficiency". The energy transition at the core of the Green Deal and European energy policies aims to resolve the contradiction between values and interests, necessary for reducing the EU's dependence on fossil fuel imports. But even in this area, dilemmas remain because most of the rare earth metals essential for green technologies are imported, mainly from China. Despite efforts to diversify the supply of resources by opening new mining operations and increasing recycling, interdependence is here to stay.

## LANGUAGE OF POWER

Since Putin's gruesome invasion of Ukraine, the EU has abandoned its inherent irenicism and its idealist-constructivist approach to international relations. Instead, it is attempting to reacquaint itself with the language of power but without really knowing how. This return to a realist vision of international relations runs up against the structural flaw in European integration: a hybrid political project can only act in external affairs if all of its components are aligned – a body whose limbs have a mind of their own behaves inconsistently after all. EU citizens, even highly placed, remain shaped by their own national political and strategic cultures. Ursula von der Leyen's reaction to the tragedy of 7 October 2023, less the position of the president of the European Commission than it was that of a German politician and former defence minister, is a case in point.

The language of power is the preserve of autonomous actors. Unlike unified sovereign states who can develop, display, and augment attributes of power in defence of their interests, the EU must constantly ensure that there is agreement on what its common interests are and how to pursue them. It is therefore no coincidence that the Union puts so much emphasis on the moral aspect of its foreign policy – values are more abstract than interests. They enable agreement on principles that mask divergences in the perception of threats or conflicting interests.

## RETHINKING NON-ALIGNMENT

So the question arises once more, this time in existential terms: what is Europe's future? What does Europe want to be? Robin to America's Batman: a small, ageing part of the "collective West", doomed to decline and to follow Washington's lead on every global issue? Or a minor appendage to the great Eurasian continent where Moscow and Beijing are now the centres of power? Does the alternative to this "strategic NATOnomy" aligned with American leadership and its values, as advocated by Atlanticists, mean cosyng up to authoritarian regimes and the infamous "Eurasian civilisation" coined by Kremlin ideologue Aleksandr Dugin and promoted by the radical right in Europe?

A depressing choice, if any.

Moments of international crisis and the strategic uncertainty surrounding them must prompt Europeans to rethink their place in the world. It is time to bring original and modern substance to a concept that emerged once out of the anticolonial and bipolar backdrop of the Cold War: non-alignment. Too often mistaken for the fearful neutrality of minor powers or the cynical opportunism of those emerging, this European form of non-alignment could be rooted in the continent's particular experience, allowing original and effective action in the world.

The first of these European experiences is historical wisdom. Like a big Taoist wheel with opposing poles, Europe is built on conflicting values. United and divided, humanist and slaver, rational and romantic, universalist and colonialist, virile and virginal: Europe is a civilisation of opposites, and the EU is built on a past both rejected and exalted. The EU's capacity to embrace the tension between human choices, to balance out conflicting perspectives and interests, and to seek constructive exits out of confrontations is fundamental.

Europe knows how to allow diversity and contradiction to coexist within its vision of the world. It knows that there is always more than one side to every situation, that dogmatic values are just as dangerous as the cynicism of purely material interests. Europeans know that multiple perspectives shine a more just, truthful light on the world. It is in this awareness of the need for balance that a non-alignment policy can be rooted, free from the suspicion of double standards that still poisons European positions and undermines its action.

The second is the value it places on the long term. Still young compared to nations that are often hundreds, even thousands, of years old, the EU is the manifestation of a deep and long-held aspiration for convergence, unity, and peace. Bound together

TAOIST,  
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CONCEPT OF  
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by shared history and sacrifice, the nations of Europe agreed to embark on a process of reconciliation. Turning Clausewitz's aphorism on its head, Europe has made policy and law the continuation of war with other means. It turns its enemies into competitors, then partners. The peoples of Europe have resolved to try and trust one another – something that requires permanent vigilance and constant work. This experience of reconciliation is one of the most valuable lessons on peace that Europe can offer the world – as long as it does not forget the long path it took to get there and expect its partners to make the same centuries-in-the-making progress in a single five-year funding programme.

The third and final key historical experience is that of power. There is another way to think about the reason for forging a politically integrated Europe that is not just about scaling up our modern states. The EU's destiny is not to build a European super-nation to rival the American empire or Chinese power. Nor is it just about raising the voices of small and middle-sized states swamped by the enormity of globalisation. European non-alignment would also be anchored in its original way of thinking about and practising power.

## **POWER THROUGH INTEGRATION AND ACTION**

If we are to understand non-alignment and power, we must return to the purpose of European integration: to spread democracy beyond the historic borders of the nation-state, to develop a transnational democracy on a continental scale. Containing a multiplicity and complexity of power relations, Europe understands the importance of non-institutional stakeholders, the crucial vitality of civil society, the value of connections and democratic experience. Engagement with non-state entities and decentralised, often subnational authorities enables the EU to circumvent the obstacles of international politics and work closely with the people of Europe, regardless of the monopoly enjoyed by their representatives.

Taoist, patient, and decentralised, the EU can give a European meaning to the concept of non-alignment provided it agrees to assert such a definition and shoulder its burden. Fundamentally, this threefold experience is already part and parcel of the EU's day-to-day actions. The challenge now is to make it a tool for power substituting the traditional displays of brute force, and demonstrating the strength of the vulnerable and the power of non-violence. As Europe no longer dominates the world, it must rethink the way that it acts within it. It is a mighty challenge given the extent to which American military strength permeates the EU's defence and the strategic culture of certain member states. But what about a French nuclear umbrella extended to Europe, for example?

Sooner or later, there will have to be a decoupling from the US in areas other than trade. In light of the failure of sanctions imposed on Russia, which has rather accelerated global fragmentation, the EU might have considered a simpler approach. It could have combined military, practical, and financial support to Ukraine with a genuine distance from the US, alongside more global negotiations to try and drive a wedge between Russia and some of its supporters.

In the same way that non-alignment is not neutrality, non-violence does not mean submission to force. The great challenge for the EU would be to strengthen its arsenal of non-alignment

– for example, with a peaceful and democratically controlled military capacity. A European army would likely only be conceivable if it were a peacekeeping force for upholding international law, wearing not blue but starry blue helmets. True non-violence does not protect against hostility and attack. We must be willing to risk lives to enable the vulnerable to prevail.

On this path of transformation, the major danger for Europeans lies in their atavistic material and moral comforts, in their ageing societies, and in the delusion that they remain at the centre of the map. In a permanently post-Western world, Europe must reinvent itself. It has the material and spiritual means to do so. But will it have the political will and intelligence? This is the existential question that this tragic century poses.



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# NOT ABOUT TREATIES

## EU INTEGRATION NEEDS A CULTURAL SHIFT

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AN INTERVIEW WITH  
**GWENDOLINE  
 DELBOS-CORFIELD**

The multiple crises of recent years, conservative forces reviving visions of a Europe of nations, and the renewed momentum for EU enlargement raise the question of whether European democracy is equipped to face the challenges of today. According to Green MEP Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, what the Union needs most is not institutional reform but a cultural change, including among progressives.

**GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL:** Brexit, the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the ensuing energy crisis, the climate crisis: the EU has not had it easy in the past few years. Are the EU and its institutions really set up to handle these uncertain times?

**GWENDOLINE DELBOS-CORFIELD:** The EU and its institutions are up to the task, on paper at least. The problem is more about how decisions are made in practice. The EU often does not use the tools that it has at its disposal; meanwhile, the European institutions often do not embody the sovereignty that they would claim to or offer real European leadership when it is needed. More and more people are recognising that this needs to change.

In the European Parliament, but also among member states, there is an appetite for EU treaty change. Unanimity-based decisions are recognised as a problem, especially after five years of bargaining with Viktor Orbán. We are not talking about some grand new set of treaties but proposals to make the current set-up work more effectively. The most important would be introducing qualified majority voting in the Council for all policy areas.

More than any reform, we need a cultural shift that recognises Europe as a level of political power. Today, even when the Council does not necessarily need unanimity, it still ends up working based on consensus. Elsewhere, we see European Commissioners or MEPs putting their country's interests over the European interest. It is too easy to say that we need new institutions, texts, or tools: what we need are people who embrace a way of thinking that puts European sovereignty and democracy at the centre of the big challenges of our time.

**The EU often finds itself in a sort of Catch-22. Its members can't reach a decision, so the EU responds to an event poorly. The EU is then blamed, and populist forces win more support. In turn, these forces turn out to be even less likely to compromise, and the whole situation gets worse.**

We need people to be much more engaged in Europe's young democracy and ready to fight for it. I come from France, and I can tell you that the focus of the French political elites, journalists, and civil society is on France as the number one priority with Europe as an afterthought.

I spent years going to civil society groups in France telling them that the criminalisation of NGOs in countries like Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Croatia was their problem too, and that they should work on it. They had no

interest in reaching out or building networks around these issues, but then NGOs in France began facing the same issues around criminalisation. Suddenly, these organisations realised that they were now going through the same thing that their counterparts had experienced just a few years before. This holds less true for German civil society, but is certainly the case in the Benelux and Nordic countries. We need to learn to think about our national and European democracies as being connected because that is the only way to protect and fix them.

We also need a strong narrative on Europe that progressive forces are ready to fight for. A few months out from the European elections, some social democrats are already talking about defeat and acting like there is nothing that can prevent a huge far-right force from taking over the European institutions. The Greens, too, should be fighting hard; we can't just leave space for the far right to take up.

Look at the Polish election: it shows that when progressives and democrats mobilise, they can beat the far right, whereas when progressives don't mobilise, you get Giorgia Meloni in Italy. The far-right vote is big but it's not that big. Progressives can still beat it when they fight and mobilise.

Unfortunately, the far right is increasingly organised on the European level. In the past, the stereotype of the far-right MEP who never

THE EU NEEDS  
TO URGENTLY  
RETHINK THE WAY  
IT GOES ABOUT  
ENLARGEMENT

shows up was more or less true. Today, the far right in the European Parliament works hard and is deploying a real counternarrative. On issues like gender and economic policy, they are building a coherent profile that is winning support. The far right learnt the lesson from Brexit: it no longer wants to leave the EU but destroy it from the inside.

**The war in Ukraine has brought the debate on EU enlargement back. Very concretely, which of the candidate countries do you think should join the EU and when?**

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It is hard to give a good answer to a question that asks for a clear date. First, because I think that all the candidate countries in the Balkans should join in a short space of time. It would be an unhappy situation to let some in now and make another wait for 10 years. Second, and building on that, because it is evident today that letting Serbia into the EU would not be a good idea with the country's current politics. Aleksandar Vučić in the European Union would be a second Viktor Orbán.

Because of this, the EU needs to urgently rethink the way it goes about enlargement. The accession process should make much more room for contact with civil society and be less focused on bilateral discussions with national governments. I also think that we can't enter a serious discussion with Ukraine and Moldova about accession while we continue to kick the can down the road for the Balkan countries.

The EU should consider designing a new status for these countries, some lighter form of accession. If we only offer full membership, we either say, "Yes, you can join, but in 30 years," or we say, "You can join now," but it's a false promise that we don't really mean. The truth is that the EU as it currently functions is not ready to take on that volume of population: the financial demands of accession would be huge, and the EU's voting system couldn't cope. The only country that is ready to join and that would be manageable is Montenegro because of its size. When it comes to the others, we don't have a solution...

**How concerned should the EU be about "accession fatigue" among populations frustrated at these seemingly never-ending and highly technocratic accession processes?**

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The war in Ukraine has changed the situation somewhat, even in Serbia where there is generally more support for Russia. Before the war, people were increasingly beginning to wonder what was the point of joining the EU after all. Now there is a reason, but people nevertheless find themselves stuck. On the one side, there is Russia, which is not an attractive option. On the other, there is Europe, which makes false promises that never materialise.

More than accession fatigue, it is emigration that I am concerned about. Across the Balkans, but also in Central Europe, entire generations of young people are moving to Western Europe and the United States. The EU was meant to be about staying in your country and your life improving over time, but you can't aspire for a better future or democratic change when there is little hope for your generation or the next. Saying that, whenever I am in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, or Montenegro, I see a strong and highly educated civil society fighting hard in very difficult autocratic atmospheres. I come back from my visits energised. The people fighting there aren't so much fatigued as trapped.

**So you would like to see Europe moving towards what is sometimes called a "multi-speed Europe" to accommodate these new members?**

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If "multispeed Europe" means that countries pick and choose what European integration looks like for them, then I would not advocate that. Nor would I advocate allowing current EU members to diverge, which is the direction that some Franco-German proposals go in.

However, we should consider two levels of EU membership to facilitate the enlargement process. A second circle could work to bring in quite a number of new countries with a clear timeline for full membership. It is also important that any new arrangement doesn't become a way for new members to take the benefits of the single market or the EU budget but forgo democracy and European values. These proposals are just ideas, and I'm sure that academics and experts could also help us approach this problem. The situation I want Europe to avoid is having one country joining every four years with no real reform and no solution for those that are left waiting.

The EU also needs to ask itself why it takes such strong positions with some countries and then is much more lenient with others. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania, two countries with significant Muslim populations, not incidentally, are dealt with much more stringently

than Serbia, for example. It is another reason why I think that a global solution, even if it means a second level of EU membership, is necessary and would be much more coherent.

**What about the European Political Community? Does that have a role to play?**

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No, I don't think so. We already have the Council of Europe, so what new elements does it bring? The European Political Community has no parliamentary scrutiny or citizen engagement. It is a summit for heads of state like the G7 or the G20. There's a bunch of decisions taken behind closed doors and then there's a photo opportunity. That is no way of organising a democracy, and it could be dangerous. Crucial foreign policy choices should not be made with no oversight.

**Doesn't the EU need to deepen its own integration before thinking about new members?**

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The EU is already deeply integrated. A large and ever-growing part of national legislation in EU member states is linked to the implementation of EU law. EU frameworks are already key for facing the big challenges: think climate change or macroeconomic governance. Remember also that the EU scrutinises every member state's rule of law situation, and that there is extensive cooperation on judicial matters and policing.

The integration of the EU is also advancing due to the pace of events. During the pandemic, EU countries worked together on key health decisions even though health is not an EU competence. With the war in Ukraine, European countries have acted as one on foreign policy and even military support despite the differences between member states around neutrality and NATO membership. When faced with challenges, the EU is taking on responsibility without texts and treaties, so I don't think that integration needs to go significantly further.

FOREIGN AND  
TAX POLICY  
ARE TWO AREAS  
WHERE DEEPER  
INTEGRATION  
IS NEEDED

That said, health cooperation should certainly be strengthened. Not the everyday management of hospitals but frameworks and legislation to guarantee access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive healthcare. In other areas we need more scrutiny of existing cooperation, such as police and judicial cooperation or certain EU agencies. Foreign and tax policy are two areas where deeper integration is needed. Once the EU has its own revenue through certain taxation streams, it will no longer need to plead with member states for more money every few years. In some other areas, integration is just not necessary. Primary education is fine as a national or regional competence and does not stand in contradiction to a framework to give space to European citizenship education in schools, for example.

The most important next step for integration remains the cultural shift that I mentioned earlier. We need a debate about what is happening on the European level in each European country. People need to recognise that the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights means that the EU level is essential for protecting basic freedoms.

**What do you think is at the core of the European project? Is it history? Democracy? Values? Or is it simply geography?**

It's a mix of those things. New Zealand's political system is very close to what you could consider a European democracy, but it's on the other side of the world, so you can't say that geography is not a factor. History is an important aspect: much of that history is that of war, competition, and rivalry, but it nevertheless shaped treaties and the idea of Europe itself. European democracy is also distinct from democracy in the abstract. Democracy in America has freedom of speech at its absolute centre in a way that we do not in Europe, where hate speech or speech that glorifies Nazi or fascist crimes is commonly banned.

What distinguishes Europe for me is its way of life. When the European Commission introduced a Commissioner for Protecting Our European Way of Life [since renamed the Commissioner for *Promoting* our Euro-

WHAT I UNDERSTAND AS  
THE EUROPEAN WAY  
OF LIFE IS ABOUT  
SELF-DETERMINATION

pean Way of Life] we recognised that this new portfolio was really about protecting a certain Christian way of life, and we opposed it on that basis. What I understand as the European way of life is about self-determination: not being defined and put in a box based on your social class, the colour of your skin, your religion, or who your parents are. While Viktor Orbán would argue that the individual cannot decide who or what they are, the European Union should be a space that welcomes and protects the right of the individual to define themselves.

**If the European way of life means self-emanicipation, then that is wonderful, but the European Commissioner for Promoting our European Way of Life is responsible for keeping migrants out.**

Yes, I agree that how they have used that phrase is awful, but we need our own. In French, we say “On n’est pas assigné à résidence”, which means that we are not restricted or bound to one place or role. That is the spirit that I want to get at.

How we address migration could mark the end of European values. We cannot continue to allow thousands to die at our borders to supposedly protect our way of life. The very idea of doing so is a paradox. Europe cannot flourish while this injustice goes on; we will become more and more resented around the world as we asphyxiate ourselves with walls and fences.

**The migration issue remains a fundamental challenge, but Europe did, in the end at least, navigate moments such as the pandemic with some success. Is the European Union stronger than it has been in a long time?**

At the height of the Covid-19 emergency, the first instinct of member states was to shut their borders, but then European countries chose solidarity. From Greece to the frugal countries, they all agreed on shared borrowing to fund the recovery, even if there was some moaning along the way. The same is true for the response to the war in Ukraine and the Green Deal. Over the past five years, the EU has existed by doing, so there is no need for pro-Europeans to be gloomy.

Europe is also not as divided as some people like to think. Surveys show that even when Poland had a homophobic government that restricted the right to abortion, its population was far more progressive. The same is true for Hungary. Compared to 50 years ago, people across Europe are far less racist and homophobic and much more in favour of gender equality. If the racist minority is winning elections, we progressives need to mobilise harder and more effectively. We shouldn’t be gloomy: we should be angry and ready to fight.

## It's 2035. The progressives fought and won. What does Europe look like?

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Europe has enacted strong and ambitious climate legislation, and it has paid off. Our energy is clean and affordable, and we are not wasting huge amounts of energy either. Globally, Europe is credible on the international stage and is recognised as a place that welcomes migrants. People trying to enter Europe no longer have to risk their lives and health but receive care, shelter, and proper, fair processes. We still have borders, but not hard borders.

The European Union itself has much clearer and more efficient decision-making processes, such as qualified majority voting. In part because European decision-making is finally readable, European citizens are engaged in EU politics and discuss European politics on the radio, TV and online. People of all backgrounds see themselves not only as citizens of their nations, but of Europe as well.

Most importantly of all, fundamental rights are respected across the EU and people know the true meaning of the European way of life: to live free from discrimination in all its forms.

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### GWENDOLINE DELBOS-CORFIELD

is a Green Member of the European Parliament for France. Born in Great Britain, she started her political career in Grenoble, France. In the European Parliament, she is involved in constitutional issues, civil liberties, the rule of law, digital rights, and equality.



# MEANINGS OF EUROPE

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Geopolitical necessity has revitalised the EU enlargement process, which seemed to have lost momentum in recent years. However, what Europe and European integration represent for people in its prospective member states varies greatly on the basis of personal and collective backgrounds and experiences, domestic political situations, and competing visions for the future. What's more, these perceptions can shift over time, depending on the Union's adherence to its promises and the values it professes, from free movement to democratic rights and ecological protection.

This series, with contributions by authors from North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Albania, Kosovo, and Moldova aims to provide a glimpse into different meanings of Europe. After all, as the integration process is a two-way relationship, the EU's visions of its enlargement are only one side of the coin. Here is the other.

## FRAGILE EUROPE

### NORTH MACEDONIA

Before revealing itself in its vastness and fragility, Europe evoked to poet Nikola Madžirov nothing but the sweetness of chocolate from a factory in Skopje.



#### NIKOLA MADŽIROV

is a poet, essayist, and translator born in 1973 in Strumica, Yugoslavia, into a family of refugees from the Balkan Wars. He won the Hubert Burda poetry award with the book *Relocated Stone* (2007). His poems have been translated into more than forty languages. He lives in the city of his birth.

I was born in a country where pity is a way of loving – when asked “How are you?”, people respond with “God save us from worse!” I grew up in a town on a border crossing between three states and flags torn by the wind and the inherited hatred. The silence of fear was strongest at the borders where air warfare was waged between various state radio stations, and the space filled with static between two radio stations was my home. I didn’t want anyone to understand me and wished not to understand the languages when I stood in front of a border crossing or in front of the silence at Joseph Brodsky’s grave, near the water and the passing time.

On my first trip to Venice, I bowed to the water’s vitality and its memory, I looked for Titian in the streets and on the walls of the churches, even though his “The Rape of Europa” had long since moved to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Before I was confronted with the mythological European narrative, which later became geopolitical, Europe for me was nothing but the name of the only chocolate factory in Skopje before the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Something sweet.

Later, my grandfather, the most famous confectioner and double bass player in the city (there were no others), told me there was also bitter chocolate in Europe – an oxymoron that was foreign to us children who had grown up with the ideological puritanism of state socialism, that soup can only be salty, cheese only white, and the poet only as glorious as the country.

For fifteen years now, I have lived outside the contexts of a permanent home and the geographies of belonging. About twenty years ago I put on the uniform because the country said I had to. I was a soldier between two wars in the Balkans – it’s easier to put it that way than to say I was a soldier in peacetime. Fragility is my only weapon nowadays.

For a long time, the word FRAGILE was a sticker on the cardboard boxes of the televisions or glass display cabinets sold by my father, which people filled with heaps of plates and glasses they only used when there were weddings and funerals at home.

Before I acquired the alphabet of meanings, FRAGILE was a sign of untouchability, a synonym for danger rather than fragility. Europe's fragility is dangerous because you can't see it – a cracked stone in a mosaic that resists time and predatory diggers. I love Europe for its imaginative and real vastness, which allows me to be alone when I don't want to return to the room of narrow geographical or literary definiteness. I travel with the language to a place where I wish we could communicate with just one look – with a look at the beauty or at the sky as depth or symbol, that sky that is counterpoint of all aggressions, like Kurosawa's skies in *Rashomon*. Europe is built of languages, perhaps that is why it is fragile, organic, indomitable. Maybe I sound romantically naïve, but I think we travel to carry words, stones, dust, hopes.

But I always returned home to see my son growing faster than my longing for a safe home, I returned to the language of my childhood, to the words that allowed me to travel through the interstices and various silences – the two things that create me as I create. "Silence is my most majestic, my most peaceful, but also my clearest declaration of war or manifestation of contempt," Derrida wrote. In the silence I feel safe, despite the loud noise of passport stamping, a civilisational sign that now makes it possible to cross the borders drawn after the wars. ■

## A MEASURE OF RELEVANCE

### SERBIA

Strategic migration control and ongoing negotiations over Kosovo complicate Serbian perceptions of EU accession, despite rising fears of environmental damage and youth violence.

No one was alarmed when less than half of Serbians from last year's government poll said that they would vote for their country to join the European Union. Media coverage was negligible. No politician voiced an opinion. Not even the Ministry for European Integration, which ran the annual survey, was concerned that, for the first time, only 43 per cent of those polled supported the accession bid. How has Serbian society arrived at such a point of indifference about its biggest political, strategic goal?

The complexity of this issue makes it difficult to answer the above question with certainty and convincingly. However, two reasons are clear.

Rather than suddenly plummeting, Serbian attitudes to EU membership have shown a steady decline in the polls. Over the past decade, Serbian media, under strong governmental influence, has often portrayed the collective West in a very negative light, while Russia and China have been presented in an overwhelmingly positive way.

On many occasions, President Aleksandar Vučić and other officials have depicted the EU as an endlessly demanding, arrogant entity that cannot be satisfied. In truth, however, Serbian reforms, necessary for accession, are being stalled and earlier advances are even regressing in many policy areas. Administratively, the process is still active, but, in practice, it has been sliding backwards for a very long time.

The second key reason that Serbian citizens reject the EU comes from the Union itself and its stance towards the Serbian government. Look up any internationally recognised index on democracy, media and other free speech channels, corruption, or the rule of law, and you'll see Serbia endlessly falling down the charts. Look at the Serbian government's love of not very democratic countries, like Russia and China. Look at the reports of local civil sector organisations on the legality and fairness of Serbia's elections. It is not a pretty picture, and it is getting worse by the day.



### BRANKO ČEČEN

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Yet the EU consistently supports Vučić's government, publicly and directly. Its own agendas lurk behind this enthusiasm. One blatant strategic exchange concerns several tens of thousands of migrants in Serbia retained before reaching the Union. And Kosovo remains a key focus of EU intervention. While Serbia is pressuring to regain its influence over Kosovo, the EU and the US want to normalise relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Given that Russia and China are largely behind Serbia on this issue in the UN, it seems evident that the EU will continue exchanging its support for the Serbian government in return for every small step that helps the negotiation process move forward.

Such concessions confuse and disappoint the average EU-supporting Serbian. Meanwhile, those voters who stand firmly behind nationalistic slogans, carefully fed by pro-government media, consider Kosovo to be rightfully Serbian and Russia and China to be solid friends.

Despite these split loyalties, Serbian citizens unite around certain issues. Threats to the environment, equally important to all societal groups regardless of their political persuasion, provoked a series of demonstrations between 2019 and 2022. As a result, the government had to shelve its plans for lithium mining in the Jadar valley. Chapter 27 of the EU acquis regarding environmental protection is one of the highest reform hurdles for prospective members of the Union. However, when the citizens of notoriously polluted Serbia rose in protest, the EU, caught between its political interest and what it

professes, was conspicuously silent. Only NGOs, with which possess little influence, mentioned the regulation.

When a boy killed nine of his classmates and a guard at a Belgrade school on 3 May 2023, the focus shifted. Just one day later, a young man killed nine young people and injured 12. The massacres incited uprisings and demonstrations, pushing issues of environmental protection into the background; society suddenly had more immediate issues to resolve.

Seen as the entity that supports whatever the Serbian government does, the EU is barely mentioned in debates on how to ensure that such violence never happens again. Even though its democratic values could be seen as critical to this issue, the EU is failing to convince Serbian society of its relevance. ■

## A FREE MARKET OF VALUES

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### TURKEY

Turkey's aspirations for EU accession, often cast as the want for market and visa liberalisation, also uphold an ongoing determination for equality and justice.

Ever since I learned of its values, I have believed in Europe. Most Turkish citizens also believed in it – at least for a time. Polls from the early 2000s showed Turkish levels of support for the European Union at around 75 per cent. True, we might have believed in Europe for different reasons, me and the majority of Turkish citizens, but we jointly believed in its potential for our lives.

As a twenty-something who watched Turkey gain candidate status at the Helsinki Summit in 1999 and the December 2004 declaration that Turkey was ready for full membership negotiations, I was excited about Europe. I believed Europe embodied my values. Membership of its Union would set them in stone in Turkey, too. Europe equalled a willingness to expose one's national identity and history to a radical critique, a readiness to confront any crime that emerged. Europe equalled openness about sexuality, acknowledgement of the freedoms and rights for those who don't conform to cis heterosexual norms. Europe equalled democratic acceptance of all forms of politics. Radical Marxists, Kurdish nationalists, eco-warriors, and Islamists all had the right to political representation: Europe was there to ensure that.

When Europe demanded these values from Turkey during membership negotiations over the 2000s, I said those were my values, too. In urging them, I maintained that Europe and its values constituted Turkey's future.

Two decades on from the mid-2000s, and I still believe in Europe and those values. Whether Europe remains Turkey's future is a different question, however. According to polls from the early 2010s, levels of support for Europe fell to 58 per cent. In 2017 the figure dropped further to 48 per cent; over half of the country said "no" to Europe. Then, when the Turkish economy collapsed, support began to climb again – nowadays, it's at around 50 per cent.

How can my belief in Europe remain unfazed when that of other Turkish citizens has fluctuated dramatically? Europe continues to be Turkey's leading trade partner, and I suspect the previous support expressed a desire for market integration rather than embracing Europe's ethical and political values: it was a thirst



### KAYA GENÇ

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for more market and visa liberalisation. Turkish people wanted the free movement of people and goods. But Europe's leaders wanted only the latter: the idea of Turks swarming into their lands terrified them. What people like me demanded and desired, on the other hand, was the free movement of values. Like in Spain, we wanted to examine the military regime that ruled the country only decades previously. Just like in Germany, we wanted the freedom to interrogate the genocidal chapters of our past. Like in France, we wanted more vital workers' unions and rights and protections for activists.

This shared European vision of the free movement of values remains sadly unrealised. And, in the meantime, while trade has never been freer, Turkey's increasingly impoverished citizens are refused even short-term visas to Europe. Recently, Turkey's role as a guardian of refugee movements has solidified instead.

The Europe of my twenties has changed beyond recognition. Policies of leading European governments resemble Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's autocratic regime more closely with every passing day. From Italy to Hungary, nasty, cynical politics that despises the likes of us – the so-called "rootless cosmopolitans and degenerates" – is rising. But I retain hope. Progressive thinkers and activists in Europe continue to push forward values integral to that shared European vision from two decades ago. The tunnel that separates us has never seemed so long. Yet some light continues to shine at its end, even as Turkey faces suspension from the Council of Europe thanks to the recklessness of its strongman. ■

## LONGSTANDING EUROPEAN DREAM

### ALBANIA

Aspiration meets realism in Albania, where eventual EU accession requires renewed political direction able to retain the country's youth.

Three decades ago, Albanian students throughout the country took to the streets in massive protests for freedom and democracy, chanting, "We want Albania to be like the rest of Europe." Still today, more than 90 per cent of Albanians see EU membership as a firm objective and vivid destination.

For Albanians, the route to EU citizenship is first and foremost a state of mind. It reinforces their freedom to move, speak up, and pursue an alternative way of life, which, until the late 1980s, had been strictly prohibited under 50 years of dictatorial isolation. Membership is also seen as the opportunity to identify with and join a community following democratic values and principles, completing a long and painful transition from authoritarian rule to democracy.

Albania is one of the exceptional cases where Euro-Atlantic integration has never been contested, either at a societal level or among its political elites. However, with not enough wind in the sails, the dream is yet to turn into reality.

Pervasive corruption and a political class focused on personal interests, constantly undermining the reform agenda, are major hindrances to EU integration. The recent EU-backed judicial reform in Albania is, however, considered a potential turning point for its European prospects. Either the country will manage to succeed in eradicating existing wrongdoings in preparation for EU membership, or public trust in ever acceding will crumble.

Nevertheless, Albanian citizens are fully aware that they will not join the Union by 2030. The prime minister has reiterated on different occasions that accession is more distant and does not solely rely on the country's efforts. As time passes, the younger generation is becoming increasingly disillusioned. Influenced by social media and driven by their energy, ambition, and impatience, young people are choosing to leave the country in search of better prospects in EU member states. Today's migration primarily concerns the middle class, whose access to quality education develops their knowledge of technical skills and foreign languages. Albania's youth resemble the country's wild Vjosa river crossing the country, seeking alternative flows to Europeanise immediately instead of waiting patiently for Europe to come to them.



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According to Eurostat, more than half a million Albanians have received an EU member state passport since 2002, of which 49 per cent hold Italian citizenship. In the past 15 years, almost 0.76 million Albanians have received a residence permit for an EU country. These figures are alarming given that Albania's population is only 2.8 million. But should the glass be seen as half full rather than half empty, this figure is also promising: the ongoing Europeanisation of emigrant communities abroad might both exert a spill-over effect on the national political elites and improve Albania's image abroad.

Over the last two years, Albania has witnessed the emergence of new political movements led by young, well-educated leaders who were born towards the end of communism. The rise of this new elite is seen as a first step towards changing the political status quo, which is responsible for failures to modernise and challenges to society's trust in state institutions. Overcoming widespread disenchantment and depopulation, as well as advancing towards membership within a reasonable timeframe, rest on these emerging leaders.

Today, Albania's future in the EU is not seen as a merely technical negotiation process. It is rather considered as a renewed political commitment to citizens aimed at strengthening the democratisation process and the rule of law, not least by convincing Albania's youth to remain and contribute to the prosperity of their country. ■

## ENTHUSIASM WITHOUT NAÏVETÉ

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### KOSOVO

Forged in the depths of systematic oppression, the Kosovars' staunch support for the EU reflects their desire for democracy. The bloc should stop using it as a bargaining chip.

In mid-October, European and Western Balkans leaders gathered in Tirana for the latest Berlin Process Summit. The initiative is intended to foster cross-regional cooperation and demonstrate commitment to the region's future in the European Union. But in Pristina, it was a statement by French president Emmanuel Macron that set off a storm.

That day, Kosovar citizens heard that Kosovo's visa liberalisation – expected to begin in January 2024 after years of disappointment and delay – was again suspended. Within a few hours, the statement was clarified. Somewhat unclear French and a mistranslation had triggered a false alarm. Albeit 13 years after the same right was recognised for all other countries in the region, Kosovars will finally travel visa-free in Europe's Schengen area.

However, the speed at which many Kosovars took the misconstrued statement at face value spoke to a concerning reality. When it comes to the EU, the feelings of so many Kosovars has become infused with distrust. Today, the EU is increasingly seen through the lens of injustice, with the expectation of being let down constantly lurking in the background.

Such sentiments derive from experience, and the 10-year visa liberalisation process is just one example. The bloc's political approach toward the "normalisation of relations" dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is another. Since 2011, the EU has been arbitrarily selective as to for what, and when, it chooses to call out "non-compliance" within the dialogue framework - and especially how and toward whom. This selectiveness has intensified in the past couple of years. Serbia's escalating attempts to undermine Kosovo's sovereignty are increasingly appeased, while Kosovo is expected to remain nothing short of fully compliant to the point of servitude.

Although Macron's statement was not about suspending Kosovo's visa liberalisation, its mention was steeped in the language of political bargaining. Despite the visa decision having already been made, he again linked it to political conditionality – that Kosovo must show gratitude, that it should pay back its



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debt to the EU for recognising this right for its citizens, and that it should do so by engaging in the dialogue in the manner that the EU expects.

For Kosovars, it has become clear that the EU has embraced a narrow practice of politics, that of *quid pro quo*. For Macron, the “trade” is between a right (freedom of movement) and submissiveness. For Miroslav Lajčák, the EU’s Special Representative for the dialogue, it is similar: he gets to choose which past agreements are deal breakers and which can be swept under the carpet for political expedience. In doing so, he appears to assume unchallenged power to dictate that Kosovo has no European future based on his interpretation alone.

By and large, Kosovars have become accustomed to such EU behaviour. Yet despite it all, they continue to be among the staunchest supporters of the EU and the integration process. This ambition is not without context and dates back even to before the EU officially promised the region a glorious future in the “family of nations” in the early 2000s. It is an ambition forged in Kosovo’s darkest depths of systematic oppression; a desire for a distant ideal of democracy.

Such enthusiasm and belief should not be mistaken for naïveté. Kosovars are acutely aware of the need for a continuous negotiation of what constitutes governance for all its citizens, and in turn, expect to be treated fairly.

It is the EU that appears to have lost its way. If this kind of EU political behaviour is legitimised, and if the feeling of distrust and the expectation

of being let down by the EU are normalised, then European values of equality, freedom, and human dignity are at risk.

Those values are the core ideals and principles upon which Europe was built and towards which it once aspired. Kosovars hope that the EU will return to them soon. ■

## BELONGING AND DEVELOPMENT

### MOLDOVA

Cultural and political belonging in Moldova is complex and affects how the EU is viewed. Could placing the idea of Europe at the heart of the country's development agenda create a positive consensus going forward?

Shaped by the country's common heritage with Romania, its Russian imperial and Soviet past, and the internationalisation of its youth, the culture of Moldova – a former Soviet republic bordered by Romania and Ukraine – is marked by diverse, intersecting socio-cultural milieus or “cultural bubbles”.

The biggest bubble cherishes Moldova's deeply local traditions: winemaking, delicious food, folk music, and celebrations such as weddings.

A second cultural bubble is rooted in Moldova's Romanian-language cultural heritage, literature, and music. Romanian culture experienced a revival in Moldova in the late 1980s and 1990s during the national renaissance that grew up in protest against Soviet Russification. In recent years it has been modernised and revitalised via migration as well as increased exchanges between the Romanian and Moldovan music, literature, film, and theatre scenes.

A further cultural bubble – distinguished by the use of the Russian language – was inherited from the Soviet era. Successfully perpetuated by the Russian media following Moldovan independence in 1991, this cultural bubble only began to shrink in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Finally, the newest bubble, which is proving particularly attractive to educated young people, has strong links to anglophone culture. This is spread via films, music, and social media, and is a fruit of time spent working or studying abroad.

Some level of connection to local traditions is shared by all Moldovans and cannot be associated with political affiliation. But Moldovans' relative degree of comfort with the Romanian, Russian, and anglophone cultural bubbles appears to be strongly linked to geopolitical views and voting preferences.

Interestingly, feelings of cultural belonging are not always rooted in one's native tongue but also in second languages. While Romanian speakers tend to be stronger supporters of the EU than Russian speakers, certain speakers of Romanian feel most



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at home within Russian culture and are more closely aligned with Moscow. Similarly, there is a sizeable group of Russian speakers who feel comfortable with English and/or Romanian and are staunchly pro-European.

Voter behaviour can also be surprising. In 2015, the central Moldovan town of Orhei, 40 kilometres north of the capital Chişinău, voted in pro-Russian oligarch Ilan Shor as its mayor. Shor, who is currently living in hiding in Israel following convictions for fraud and money laundering, promised to transform the town into "Monaco", as well as repair all roads and provide free public transport and Wi-Fi at his own cost. His hand-picked successor, Shor party member Pavel Verejeanu, won the 2019 mayoral election with 80 per cent of the vote. Curiously, however, the same Orhei residents cast their votes for the pro-European current incumbent Maia Sandu in the 2020 presidential election.

The idea of Europe is increasingly gaining ground in Moldova, primarily as a dream and promise of modern development. In the Chişinău mayoral election in November 2023, PAS candidate Lilian Carp and Platforma DA's Victor Chironda both used the slogan "For A European City" for a period of time. The candidate eventually elected was incumbent Ion Ceban, who won his 2019-2023 mandate as a member of pro-Russian party PSRM. Having subsequently vouched to become a technocrat and leave geopolitics behind, Ceban has since changed tack, founding the National Alternative Movement (MAN), which he claims to be a pro-European social demo-

cratic party. While some analysts saw this as a pragmatic step aligned with Moldova's general turn towards Europe, in October 2022 the US Department of the Treasury stated that political consultants close to the Kremlin helped Ceban set up his new venture. A recent investigation by Russian Dossier Center and the Estonian newspaper Eesti Paevaleht also revealed that Ceban was on a secret visit to Moscow and St Petersburg days the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These allegations, which were subsequently refuted by Ceban, suggest that he may be a Trojan horse designed to block Moldova's path to EU integration. To date, the Moldovan authorities have failed to open any public investigation into the matter.

In addition to the dream of making Chişinău a "European city", Moldova has also introduced "The European Village", a local development programme focused on sustainability, the provision of quality public services, and access to social infrastructure. For inhabitants of the Moldovan capital, this could mean the creation of cycle lanes, better maintained parks, improved public transport, and a halt to illegal construction projects. A possible solution to rural depopulation, "European villages" aim to offer peaceful rural locations combined with modern sewerage and sanitation infrastructure, well-maintained kindergartens and schools, and green energy. Beyond Moldova's national aspirations for a reformed, fair judiciary and less corruption, this is what Europe means to its citizens. ■

# TEARING DOWN FORTRESS EUROPE

## MIGRATION AS UTOPIA

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ARTICLE BY

ALEKSANDRA  
SAVANOVIĆ

Humans have always moved across regions and continents. Yet how that happens today is increasingly dystopian, heavily bound within the nation-state and capitalist logic. Even as migrants endure militarised, inhumane systems and are called a threat to Europe’s “way of life”, they are also courted as indispensable for the economy. Aleksandra Savanović invites us to step back and, shedding the confines of preconceived ideas about future and progress, imagine together a more utopian migration.

**M**igration is one of today’s most powerful, and most entrenched, imaginaries. The word conjures up images of walls, borders, police, uncertainty, destitution, misery, death. Migration is most commonly discussed as a menace, an unwanted but “necessary evil”, a reluctant sacrifice offered at the altar of economic health.

Political discourse around migration is saturated with fear. Migrants are framed as both a crisis, a threat to our identity, here to “destroy our way of life”, and as unfair adversaries in the labour market, here to “take our jobs”. Encouraged by far-right narratives, which see migration as a symptom of today’s globalised, free-rein capitalism, public concerns are directed first and foremost at the protection of national borders, to protect *our* way of life, *our* jobs. The rhetoric is nostalgic, longing for those good old times of (sovereign!) nations, family wages, and (white) male bread-winners – no matter that sovereignty, family wages, and decent jobs were only available to some.

To a certain extent, the European Union's policy reflects these sentiments. In fact, the term "European way of life" has emerged as the new official narrative of the EU since the 2019 European elections. Its approach is above all practical, forged through compromise among EU member states as (economic) liberals championing more "market" and diversity clash with social conservatives claiming to protect "traditional" – or supposedly non-capitalist – institutions like the family and nation, often alluding to ethnic purity. But even right-wingers must admit – although not explicitly – that without a steady influx of foreign labour, most EU countries would soon be facing economic collapse. They therefore accept immigration but want more filtering and fewer rights for immigrants. A scandal in Poland relating to hundreds of thousands of working visas being issued in return for bribes, which took place while anti-immigration party Law and Justice (PiS) was in power, is a case in point. The ostensible paradox is illusory.

## A FALSE DICHOTOMY

The supposed dichotomy between capitalism and the nation-state – as that between family and capitalism – is a false one. As philosopher Nancy Fraser puts it, capitalism must be understood as an institutionalised social

order on par with feudalism rather than solely a mode of production based on exploitation.<sup>1</sup> It could not exist without incorporating and relying on the existing systems of politics, nature, and social reproduction. It is nation-states that hold the "extra-economic means" – to use the terminology of Marxist political theorist Ellen Meiksins Wood<sup>2</sup> – of political, judicial, and police/military power through which capitalism's supposedly independent economic "mechanisms" can be put to work.

The situation is no different in the context of a globalised economy. More than ever, global capital depends on the uneven development of nation-states. It "feeds on" the differentiation of social conditions among national economies and exploitable low-cost labour regimes. The nation-state is not an innocent bystander but the instrument of this differentiation.

Sociologist Melinda Cooper argues that economic liberalism and the new social conservatism in fact represent two sides of the same, capitalist, coin.<sup>3</sup> Drawing from Marx's *Grundrisse*, she theorises that capitalism is constituted by an unrelenting movement to overcome its limits, to subsume everything under its law of value, and simultaneously by an equally powerful counter-effort to impose them. The migrant – as cheap labour – is thus produced in

1 Nancy Fraser & Rahel Jaeggi (2018). *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*. Cambridge, Oxford, New York & Boston: Polity.

2 Ellen Meiksins Wood (2002). *The Origin of Capitalism*. London & New York: Verso.

3 Melinda Cooper (2019). *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*. New York: Zone Books.

**BETWEEN "MORE MARKET"  
AND "MORE BORDER  
PROTECTION", THE EU  
OPTS FOR BOTH**

the interplay between the unrestricted reach of capitalism and the necessary confining borders of nation-states. In other words, the positing of the nation-state as foundational at the same time as (relatively) permitting migration and movement across its borders is what constitutes the migrant as cheap labour.

### **DYSTOPIAN OUTLOOK: FORTRESS EUROPE**

Fortress Europe, or the Mediterranean graveyard, as an increasingly realistic vision and outcome of Europe's migration policy, comes as a direct expression of this capitalism-inherent contradiction. Between "more market" and "more border protection", the EU opts for both.

The EU's "historic" migration deal announced in June 2023 intends to strike a balance between the two. On the one hand, it introduces a new two-track filtering system, separating prospective and non-prospective immigrants right at the border: those deemed unlikely to be accepted are subjected to stricter procedures, more easily rejected, and shipped away to basically anywhere the country deems appropriate (including places with documented human rights abuses). On the other hand, the EU prescribes "mandatory solidarity": the obligation to relocate some 30,000 successful applicants per year across the continent. Each country has the possibility to either take in

migrants or pay 20,000 euros for each person they reject. The money collected would go into a common fund to be used to finance undefined projects abroad.

Though undefined, one may easily surmise what those projects are. During her visit to Tunisia with Italian far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in July, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen promised to "support Tunisia with border management", for which the EU will provide 100 million euros. Similar funding schemes and agreements to outsource migration management and detention facilities abound. A report from 2021 found that the EU and its member states fund the construction of detention centres, conduct other detention-related activities (like the training of guards), and advocate for detention in 22 countries in the Balkans, Africa, Eastern Europe, and West Asia, thus emulating the heavily criticised Australian model, with the intention to eventually establish offshore processing facilities. The privatisation of migrant detention is already in progress.

The same goes for border protection. The EU funnels significant funds into bolstering personnel and installing sophisticated technologies at borders, including thermal cameras, motion sensors, drones, and sound cannons for surveillance and deterrence. Member states have so far built close to 1800 kilometres of walls on their borders, and the EU is under increasing pressure to start financing these endeavours.

WHAT IF,  
INSTEAD OF  
MARCHING  
TOWARDS  
DYSTOPIA,  
WE PUT ON  
UTOPIAN  
LENSES?

Inside Fortress Europe, however, movement is encouraged and in some instances even idealised, praised as one of the EU's success stories (as in the case of Erasmus+). Whereas immigration from outside of Europe is set to destroy the "European way of life", intra-EU migration is seen as advancing it. Nevertheless, it is framed in similarly functional terms, to be conducted only when there's a need (i.e. when national workers are hard to come by).

Against this backdrop, calls for reform such as those proposing a drastic increase and expansion of circular migration schemes to encompass third-country nationals beyond those with visa-free travel (and intra-EU migrants) appear short-sighted, if not utilitarian and discriminatory. In this manner, liberal thinkers such as Branko Milanović propose schemes that could range from those presently existing in Gulf countries – where foreign workers have no rights whatsoever – to those that offer migrants a wider set of rights but only for limited periods of time.<sup>4</sup> Aware that his solution is bound to produce an underclass, he nevertheless prefers it to Fortress Europe.

However, the morally dubious perspective that discusses migration only in terms of what Europe "needs" is equally dystopian, not to mention that it fails to take into account the cost of all that "circulation" for those doing it or propose ways to approach the upcoming mass climate migration.

## PROGRESSIVE UTOPIAS

Fortress Europe certainly isn't the only dystopia out there. In light of the climate crisis, new concepts of communal life are cropping up everywhere. From Saudi Arabia's plan for smart city The Line to billionaire Peter Thiel's autonomous city "somewhere in the Mediterranean", the future looks grim. So what if we turn the tables? What if, instead of marching towards dystopia, we put on utopian lenses?

<sup>4</sup> Branko Milanović (2019). *Capitalism, Alone*. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press.

The supposed “end of history” – the idea that humanity has evolved to its final political and economic system in capitalist liberal democracy, as “there is no alternative” – also meant the “end of future” in philosopher Franco Berardi’s terms,<sup>5</sup> or the “end of utopia” in sociologist Rastko Močnik’s.<sup>6</sup> It heralded the rejection of utopias, seeing them as dangerous projects, irrational and escapist, or even potentially totalitarian.

Underpinning this idea of the end of history is the modernist pairing of utopia and progress,<sup>7</sup> the marriage of utopian impulses with the view of history as a linear succession of stages, each better than the last. At the pinnacle of progress, no higher stages are to be found; there is nowhere further to go.

We now know that history never ended. In fact, we are living through its turbulent “return”. We also know that utopias didn’t end either. They simply got a sort of dystopian overhaul. We didn’t stop imagining other worlds (there are plenty of worse worlds we can think of); we stopped imagining better ones.

Countering the modernist framing of utopia, the work of philosopher Ernst Bloch decouples utopias from the idea of progress. After all, the notion of progress is inseparable from various

kinds of subjugation: patriarchy, colonialism, imperialism, and exploitation, to name just a few. Bloch sees utopia as a critical analysis of conventional constructions (or imaginaries) of reality, time, and the possible – a critical negation of that which merely *is* and a challenge to assumptions about what is possible and impossible in the present. In Blochian philosophy, the future is open; it is presented not as a blueprint but rather a direction, a horizon.

## NEW HORIZONS

Following Bloch in his search for non-progressive utopias, his insistence on the possibility of change and the role of subjects within it (as opposed to current trends of leaving human subjects out and counting on objects, nature, or technology), and his emphasis on processes – on the becoming, rather than on being – we could try sketching out other migration policy directions.

A place to start is turning away from utilitarian approaches that permit migration on the basis of need – like labour shortages or ageing populations – and, instead, taking a proactive, subject-centred view on migration futures.

A radical examination of what the EU is and should be about is indispensable to avoid the apartheid-shaped ditch we are headed to if

5 Franco Berardi (2011). *After the Future*. Chico: AK Press.

6 Rastko Močnik (1995). *How Much Fascism?* Ljubljana: Studia Humanitaria Minor.

7 Thoughts on utopia and its interpretation in Blochian terms I owe to conversations with Maja Kantar and her unpublished work.

A RADICAL EXAMINATION  
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Europe becomes home to a two-tier system of citizenship. What exactly are those “European values” so tirelessly vaunted? At the moment, it seems to be an arbitrary selection of characteristics Europe wants to be known for – like democracy, the rule of law, and economic prosperity – which omits inconvenient ones like domination, exploitation, colonialism, fascism, and the ongoing brutal treatment of migrants. Another trope, the need to preserve a European “way of life”, a post-modern fascist favourite phrase and an official EU narrative, now acts as a suitable replacement for the overly problematic “blood and soil” justification. Identitarian reasoning is thus central to the EU’s thinking on migration, which is therefore bound to fail.

Moving away from a focus on ethno-nationalistic or even cultural bonds and instead building communities united around common goals – such as ecological sustainability, quality health care, and social protections – would shift the EU from a dystopian outlook to the realm of utopia. This scenario would also imply reconsidering citizenship laws – a step European elites seem unwilling to take.

Curiously, however, the Serbian government might.<sup>8</sup> Serbia recently adopted amendments to its citizenship law that would, if passed,

allow immigrants and asylum seekers to receive Serbian citizenship after just 12 months of temporary residence. Responding to the move, EU officials warned that harmonising Serbia’s migration policy with the EU’s is essential for the functioning of the visa-free regime currently in place.

In their book *The Dawn of Everything*, David Graeber and David Wengrow offer a convincing rebuttal of the common wisdom that human societies advance from one stage to another in a linear “progressive” fashion.<sup>9</sup> In fact, humans have shifted between hierarchical and egalitarian forms of organisation for millennia, consciously building and destroying social orders. Graeber and Wengrow identify three basic social freedoms: freedom to disobey; freedom to move away; and freedom to create and transform social orders. These are found across cultures and centuries, facilitating the ability of pre-modern peoples to leave behind – by transforming, destroying, or simply abandoning – social setups that have become inappropriate or unwanted.

In contrast to the modern (Western) concept of individual freedom, where to be free means to be self-sufficient and as such is inseparable from private property, for the indigenous

<sup>8</sup> However, the move is certainly much more utilitarian than utopian (which doesn’t mean it has no utopian potential): it most probably comes as an effort to keep Russian citizens, or rather their successful businesses, in the country (between 40,000 and 100,000 of them, depending on the estimate, moved to Serbia on the eve and just after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, opening up to 5000 businesses).

<sup>9</sup> David Graeber & David Wengrow (2021). *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. London: Allen Lane.

societies of America, individual freedom was embedded within structures of care; it implied that people permitted each other to live without fear of falling through the cracks. So why not re-examine the very foundations of our social environments?

What if, instead of investing in detention centres, we invest in elaborate social infrastructures that facilitate immigration by providing appropriate shelter, subsistence, and guidance? What if we use existing infrastructures not for profit-making but for humanity-saving purposes? What if we allow the creation of autonomous communities that develop their own avenues for migration among themselves? Dystopian avenues are already here, so why not try for utopian ones as well? What if we are no longer compelled to own but rather to take care of, to look after, to become custodians of our shared social and natural wealth? This future has no script. There's no certainty about how it goes. It's entirely open-ended.

Perhaps, then, the most crucial step to be taken lies in the realm of imagination, in an effort to radically challenge the notions of what is possible, to break away from collective, socially engineered, and subsequently naturalised ideas about what can and cannot be achieved. What happens next is in our hands.

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# BREXIT UNDONE

## A FUTURE HISTORY OF BRITAIN

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ARTICLE BY

**MOLLY SCOTT CATO**

Riding on a wave of populism and euroscepticism, the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU in 2016. After a toxic exit campaign and a painful divorce process, the damage to the UK's relationship with the bloc seemed irreparable. Fortunately, this was not the case, a dispatch from 2050 confirms.

Looking back on the turbulent events of the early years of this century, it is hard to believe that one of the leading architects of the green and democratic Europe of 2050 could have once been the problem child of the EU. After a decade of economic depression and disillusion with narratives of independence, the UK has more than atoned during its nearly twenty years of positive EU membership since rejoining in 2033.

In hindsight, Brexit can be seen as a consequence of the teething troubles of becoming a truly global and interconnected world. It is hard to remember now that offshoring and digital technologies posed an existential threat to democracy in the 2020s. The success of the European Green Deal and sustainable finance legislation was vital in creating quality green jobs and countering the disillusion with what historians now call the “stale decades”, when many voters dismissed politicians as little more than corporate shells.

Of course, the EU's Positively Digital legislation – inspiring similar regulation across the world – was crucial in countering online disinformation and digital attacks on democracy. The EU's bold investments in green infrastructure in African countries during those decades reversed centuries of exploitation and helped reduce the emigration of talented Africans, which many European politicians had used to stir up resentment. In my advanced old age, you will indulge me if I reflect on how we achieved this success and how differently things might have turned out following the UK's ill-informed vote to leave the EU in 2016.

## **DEREGULATION OR COOPERATION?**

In the end, it all happened faster than any of us could have imagined. After a few years of a Labour government doing its very best to make Brexit work in the 2020s, it was quite clear that this was simply unfeasible and that the damage we had done to ourselves by leaving the EU could not be repaired in some piecemeal process. The only option was to reverse it.

The kind of Brexit we most feared, the one that involved deregulation and what is referred to by historians as Singapore-on-Thames, never became a reality. Most attempts to set up cut-and-paste versions of European laws were rejected by businesses, who did not want to have to make products to two different standards. After promising not to repeal various pieces of environmental legislation, the discredited Brexit government of 2019 to 2024 (commonly regarded as the worst government in the modern history of the UK) abandoned controls on pollution, and it seemed that we were destined to return to being the “dirty man of Europe”.

After Boris Johnson became prime minister in 2019 with the deceitful slogan “getting Brexit done”, the 2024 election offered a new leaf. While Brexit was barely mentioned by Labour or the Conservatives, the damage it had done to our economy and our political fabric lurked in the background and in the minds of many voters.

Outside of government after their electoral defeat, the Tories became even more extreme, arguing for “Brexit Unchained”: the UK as the deregulated, polluted, free-market nightmare that its most ardent supporters dreamed of back in 2016. In 2024, Labour inherited a country in a direful and broken state. Our rivers were little more than open sewers, our public buildings literally falling apart, and our hospitals barely functioning because of staff shortages and ever-increasing waiting lists.

In this context, the idea that undermining EU environmental protections or further reducing the right to strike could possibly solve our problems looked both cruel and fantastical. It took a few years, but the prophecy that Brexit would spell the end of the Conservative Party was eventually fulfilled.

## **LABOUR ACCEPTS THE INEVITABLE**

Labour had come into government in 2024 with strict fiscal rules, pledging to fund investment from growth. With no strong ideological attachment to what the Conservatives of the time framed as “Brexit freedoms”, whether on workers’ rights or environmental protections, the Labour government limped on with its acquiescence to the Brexit mantras, while the economy stalled and the desperately urgent needed investments in public services were put on hold.

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EVENTUALLY  
FULFILLED

The handful of Green MPs elected in 2024 kept strong pressure on Labour to take environmental protection and the energy transition seriously. Labour did their best to achieve a sort of “Green re-alignment”, keeping as close as possible to EU laws as they evolved. Closer cooperation was especially successful in two areas: energy and defence. UK Energy Minister Edward Miliband had always been considered a European leader on climate policy, and he worked closely with other EU energy ministers and with the support of the UK’s emboldened Green MPs to strengthen the COP process and build more positive global action on the climate emergency.

At the same time, the transition to renewables made energy cooperation essential. Balancing renewable energy across the grid needed more than the capacity of a single country, and the Europe-wide network of energy interconnectors became central as we moved beyond fossil fuels. It was also at the heart of a stronger and more trusting EU-UK working relationship and curiously symbolic of the way they were, in reality, still very closely connected.

The Green HydrEU initiative, launched in 2025, enabled the UK to use its excess electricity to produce green hydrogen that then replaced imported natural gas across the continent. This was the first real sign that the UK was offering something positive to Europe since the disastrous referendum of 2016.

The defence realignment of those years was also crucial in rethinking the UK’s place in the world. In 2016, cyberwars and lethal robots were top of mind. Russia’s war on Ukraine focused minds on the reality of what the EU had always been about: keeping peace in Europe. The heroic battle of the Ukrainian people brought together UK and EU defence ministers, not only to support the struggle for freedom but also to work for a true European peace, not a divided continent with an Iron Curtain a few thousand miles to the east.

The UK's experience of the peace process in Northern Ireland and Germany's experience of supporting pro-democracy forces in Eastern Europe were quietly brought to bear on Russia, which blundered its way towards democracy from the failed state and oligarchic chaos of the Putin years. It seemed little short of a miracle that just a decade after Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkans joined the EU, and a newly democratic Russia was able to as well, finally fulfilling Gorbachev's vision of a "common European home" and making a reality of the security guarantees to its territory that Ukraine had fought for.

## LEARNING THE LESSONS OF BREXIT

In spite of these successful collaborations, in the UK Brexit continued to make people's lives more complicated and business harder, while our economy drifted into stagnation. Two years into the Labour government, it was clear that the UK would continue to slip backwards economically without EU membership. A two-thirds majority of British people supported EU membership, but we still needed to convince our European partners that we would not be as disruptive in the future as we had been in the past.

By this time, the UK was clearly suffering domestically and on the global stage, being both economically and strategically weakened by the misguided decision to leave the EU. Perform-

tive trade deals with Asian economies had done nothing to mend the damage that trade restrictions with the EU had done to so many British businesses. Outside the EU, the UK lost its role as a bridge to the US and the dissolution of the Commonwealth left Britain looking increasingly isolated. Talk of a new "special relationship" with India contributed little economically and, with Russia in chaos and China increasingly authoritarian, the UK found it difficult to find friends and allies at global summits.

Labour adopted a policy of negotiating to become full EU members in their manifesto for the 2029 election and won resoundingly. The changes to the electoral system they introduced during these years effectively locked the Euroloony Conservatives (as they were by then known) out of power forever but also meant a surge of Green MPs into the 2029 Parliament, together with an increased number of Liberals. The fact that these parties had been so strongly pro-European throughout the period added credibility to the UK's negotiating position with the EU.

## A CHASTENED BUT TRIUMPHANT RETURN

The negotiations were protracted, with several national capitals understandably needing guarantees of our good faith and potential stumbling blocks over Schengen and the single currency. With Ireland also outside Schengen we were under no pressure to join initially, but within a

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decade it became clear that freedom of movement was so widespread across the continent that it simply made no sense to have a barrier at the Irish or English channels. The issue of the euro was more problematic, with many British economists and financiers strongly committed to keeping the pound. This was not a block to our becoming an EU member, but over the decade that followed, our financial markets became so intertwined that joining the euro, which was now subject to democratic control rather than under the power of bankers, was no longer a problem for most British people. The Red-Green government of 2029-34 took us in with little dissent.

The modernisation of our 17th-century democracy – especially the adoption of a proportional voting system – meant that the worst Eurosceptic forces had forever been excised from our body politic. As those who were once called Eurosceptics grew old and died, they carried on voting for their angry parties, but in ever smaller numbers, so that while they were initially represented in the parliament elected in 2029, by the end of the 2030s they no longer featured.

For most British citizens, joining the EU was a natural extension of ongoing cooperation and a chance to enjoy the boost to our economy that our original membership had meant for us. There were the small practical reasons – the pet passports and roaming charges – and the wider symbolic sense that we were, and had always been, Europeans, and that this was our club as much as anybody else's. The years on our own had taught most Brits a few lessons: that we no longer ruled the waves, that we were not exceptional, and that we should learn to play our strong but ordinary hand more skilfully and without resentment.

For politicians who returned to the EU institutions – and I am proud to count myself amongst that number – we returned with a sense of humility and historic responsibility. We understood that the values we might have taken for granted, like the rule of law and democracy, were not inviolable. The EU had guaranteed these for the devastated post-war economies, and the new Mediterranean democracies, and

then for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In an increasingly authoritarian world and with our own democratic foundations feeling much less stable than we had imagined, we were grateful to be part of the world's leading democratic bloc.

So we returned to the place we had always held: a leading legislative partner in the EU institutions. We were pleased to find that most of the laws we had contributed to during our 40 years of membership – and the EU's peculiar version of English – had survived our absence. Our return was marked by a renewed commitment to European values and European institutions. After the experience of the previous two decades, who would dare to argue that we would be better off on our own?

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# AFTERLIVES OF THE EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE

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ARTICLE BY  
**KONRAD  
BLEYER-SIMON**

Attempts to create a European public sphere since the 1990s have clashed with the media's predominantly national focus and the democratic deficit of EU decision-making. Since then, the Europeanisation process has continued and the media landscape has changed dramatically, but the offer of democratic spaces for citizens remains limited. Is a post-national democracy within reach?

**T**he idea of a European public sphere gained some popularity in the 1990s and early 2000s, a time when the EU was more ambitious about the European project. Back then, the formation of a European agora, where every European's voice would count, was seen as a logical step towards meaningful European democracy. Europeans would soon watch European television, read European newspapers, and discuss topics of European relevance. After years of crises and rising nationalism, this idea has almost been forgotten. Can it be revived?

Join me in a thought experiment. Imagine having friends in France, Poland, Estonia, and Portugal. Or in Turkey, Ukraine, Kenya, even in Japan. Imagine that you could converse with them in a common language. Imagine that you could read about recent social and political developments happening hundreds or thousands of kilometres away from home. And imagine that you could learn that many people across Europe – and the world – have the same concerns and values, political goals, and challenges as you do. Wouldn't that be great?

It is great, and it is already reality. At least that's what most – if not all – readers would say. Europe and most of the world are interconnected! Describing all the ways in which we can share information and communicate globally feels so obvious. What, then, is the point of this thought experiment?

It aims to show that yes, the world has become increasingly networked. People are increasingly aware that there is more that unites nations than what divides them. There is even a growing understanding that most challenges facing humanity – climate change, poverty, pollution, war – are global, as are their solutions. Yet discussions about international topics almost exclusively take place at an interpersonal level – between friends and family – or in elite circles. Mainstream debates, which shape political outcomes, revolve around national interests and build on long-standing stereotypes about ourselves and others. Our public spheres are still tied to national media systems and reflect a predominantly Westphalian understanding of the world and the nation-state. When wars break out in other parts of the globe (even in Europe’s immediate neighbourhood), our main concern is keeping refugees out of our countries or mitigating any adverse economic effects, even to the detriment of other members of the European community. When forests are burning, we worry it might interfere with our holiday plans; in global pandemics, we discuss how to best hoard vaccines, masks, and toilet paper.

At the level of politics and public discussions, European countries regard each other as competitors rather than partners. When high-stakes political decisions are made, such as how to manage the pandemic in Europe, the most important details are not discussed in public

but – as revealed by The New York Times in 2021 – in private text messages between the EU Commission president and the CEO of a major pharmaceutical company. Attempts to talk about European values and solutions (not to mention a global view of things) in non-exclusionary terms are painfully absent.

## SCULPTING A EUROPEAN PUBLIC

The late 20th century and the first decade of the 21st saw prominent discussions being influenced by the idea that Europe was on its way to becoming a post-national democracy, where citizens think of themselves primarily as Europeans and nationality is a mid-level component of identity that says more about where a person comes from than where they are heading. The citizens of Europe were expected to form a European “demos”, a political entity whose members, though they may disagree on almost any issue, accept that they share a common future, which they have to shape together.

Many commentators at that time relied on the work of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, in particular his theory of the public sphere, in order to figure out how people with different backgrounds could participate in the project of democracy. For Habermas, the public sphere is the space where people can gather to articulate their needs and discuss issues of common interest – in other words, to discuss politics.

For Habermas, access to this public sphere must be unrestricted – every member of society should be able to participate – so that “public opinion” can be formed. This “public opinion” was seen as a precondition of democratic governance. Habermas saw the origins of this sphere in the coffee houses and salons of the 17th and 18th centuries, where lively discussions took place among the bourgeoisie. In the 20th century, the news media – with its capacity to amplify voices in society and shape public opinion – became the venue for such discussions.

This idea of the European public emerged as a possible solution to an emerging problem, as is often the case with utopias. There were concerns, already in the 1990s, about the democratic deficit of the EU institutions. Although citizens became more exposed to and more open towards other European cultures, and the EU started gradually taking over features of states, European election campaigns stubbornly remained at the national level. Political parties remained national, and most citizens had no idea of what was going on in Brussels or Strasbourg. A common public sphere promised to fix this, by enabling European citizens to agree on the issues to be tackled at European level and together identify the means to do so.

Whether the European demos would deliberate as part of one great European public sphere or through many smaller, overlapping ones was not clear. But in fact, public deliberation can happen on many levels simultaneously – including national, regional, and local – as well as in topic-based fora, and all of these can coexist and complement each other.

Around this time, Europe saw major attempts to engage a pan-European public including *Euronews* in 1993 and then *European Voice* and its successor *Politico Europe* in the 2000s. But these publications were elite-focused, with limited reach outside the Brussels bubble. Meanwhile, many Europeans chose British or American media for an international perspective, meaning news reached them through an Anglo-Saxon filter. Still, some Europeanisation was visible in national news media

and has continued since, both in terms of the choice of topics and how they were covered, suggesting that a relatively broad cross-section of society was exposed to at least some European debates.

Why this did not evolve into something closer to a post-national media framework has a lot to do with the political developments of the early 2000s. The failure of a planned EU Constitution led to the signing of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007. While this agreement expanded the EU Parliament's competencies, it failed to promote the deep integration and federalisation intended by Europeanists. Neither the intergovernmental approach nor the calls for a two-speed Europe seemed to provide a favourable context for this, not to mention the eurozone crisis, the rise of the far-right, and the increasing anti-refugee sentiments.

## WHY AIM FOR A EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE?

From a progressive, pro-European point of view, it is hard to object to the idea of a European public sphere. Yet it is important to mention some of its early critiques as they can help us identify some of the key challenges ahead related to both the feasibility and the desirability of this utopia.

One problem highlighted was that of the chicken or the egg. If post-national politics needed a post-national public sphere, it was also true the other way; it was hard to form a proper European public sphere when EU decisions seemed opaque and the main political actors still framed their messages and policy proposals with national audiences in mind. The counter to this, of course, is that every democracy has roots in autocracy, oppression, or flight from terror – most of them still managed to build up a public sphere alongside their democratic institutions.

Another objection was that Europeanising debates might impact EU political habits. Communications researcher Silke Adam<sup>1</sup> points out that the lack of interest in EU politics allowed politicians in Brussels to seek compromises. A European public, however, might require them to elaborate on their positions to the public, thereby making deviations from their initial stance look like defeat.

In practice, however, there were already signs that this old habit of elitist decision-making would not withstand the test of time – or populist attacks. In many cases, the gulf between the EU level and the national level allowed national politicians to pretend that external constraints were responsible for most

<sup>1</sup> Silke Adam (2016). "European Public Sphere". *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication in edited version*, in Gianpietro Mazzoleni (ed.) *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZJ3X>>.

– if not all – unpopular developments, be it economic crises, austerity, or migration. The Brexit campaign may be the best example, but it is far from the only one. The European project cannot go on without better involving citizens.

Economic policy and the distribution of funds are particularly important topics in national public debates that have both European and national components; a proper debate could only take place at the European level. To a lesser extent, this was the case when anti-austerity movements were calling for significant policy reform during the eurozone crisis and when the EU's Dublin rules on migration risked paving the way to a humanitarian disaster. If we want to disentangle the complex system of EU treaties, national constitutions, laws, and policies, we need to foster meaningful European debates.

Finally, a great body of research has already pointed out that this ideal of the Habermasian public sphere was already exclusionary as it failed to involve women and minorities in the discussion, not to mention that the way in which public opinion was formed in the 20th and 21st centuries was a far cry from the discussions in 17th-century cafes, with discourse often manipulated and top-down. With that in mind, simply upscaling national media to the European level will not create a common communicative space.

This is an important point. But building a European public was never going to be a simple exercise – and certainly not one replicating the struggling model of national news media. Europeanisation should instead be seen as an opportunity to create something new and resilient, something unplagued by the shortcomings of national media. It may even be that breaking loose from its national shackles is the only way to revive news media.

## THE NEXT STEPS

While this description of today's national public spheres may sound bleak, it is important to highlight that Europe's population has become more open towards other people and cultures. Millennials and Gen-Z are more likely to speak other European languages and have international experience than their parents. Young people are more likely to consider living and working in foreign countries and gradually get immersed in their politics. Solidarity demonstrations for Ukraine or Fridays for Future climate protests take place simultaneously across countries, as do demonstrations against Fortress Europe. In many online communities, one's nationality is rarely mentioned: all that matters is the shared interest.

If Europe's citizens have indeed been evolving in a post-national direction, maybe the problem lies in the limited opportunities to participate in post-national politics. Perhaps it is not the

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quality but rather the lack of diversity and limited choice. Brussels-focused news, old-school news media, and cultural television channels are valuable but speak only to a small section of the European audience. The same applies to newer projects that include cross-border investigations, pan-European journalistic endeavours, or documentary film projects as well as future platforms planned to translate content of public interest and syndicate the creation of trustworthy news. Their value is clear, and the newer efforts especially are doing a great job at including different national narratives – instead of speaking from a Western European position disguised as an objective view from nowhere.

Still, there are few of these projects, and they are underfunded and have limited impact. While an increasing share of the content is offered in more than one European language, English is still the lingua franca and the source of most of the original content. As the most commonly spoken language in the EU, this is a practical choice to reach the largest possible audience, but it risks excluding significant parts of the population and overrepresenting the views of anglophile elites. To improve the offering, it is time to increase the support, scale up projects, and raise interest among citizens.

What better time than now? At least that is what Franco-German politician Daniel Cohn-Bendit and German public intellectual Claus Leggewie recently wrote in *Eurozine*.<sup>2</sup> They argued that the current geopolitical reality, chiefly Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, has created momentum for a sort of post-nationalism that might even transcend the borders of the EU. The ever more tangible threats to our shared values and the erratic prospects for our shared future – not to mention the proximity of human suffering – have already triggered unprecedented gestures of solidarity in European societies. It is now time to use that energy to build a strong basis for what could become a European public.

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2 Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Claus Leggewie (2023). "Europe's second chance". *Eurozine*. 14 July 2023. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZJ62>>.

But what exactly should the components of such a European public be, if a television news channel is not enough? For starters, we need to take into account that the media landscape has thoroughly changed since the discussion about the European public sphere abruptly ended in the 2000s.

For many people, newspapers and television stations have become irrelevant. Social media has become the dominant source of information, not only as a gateway between traditional media and audiences but also increasingly where new information is shared. These platforms are now the shared information infrastructure of people the world over. Due to their inherent logic of profit maximisation they are, however, more likely to radicalise and pit people against each other than enable constructive discussion.

Reflecting on this problem, digital policy expert Francesca Bria recently called for a European “tech ecosystem for the public interest”, which would enable public discussions without being captured by dominant online platforms.<sup>3</sup> A first step to achieving this, argued Bria, could be a “European alternative to Twitter”, which is “independent and public, able to manage data [while] preserving the digital sovereignty of citizens and to create high-quality content and journalism”.

But “Euro-Twitter” (or “Euro-X”) is just the beginning. The infrastructure of the public sphere must rest on many pillars, incorporating the fragmented efforts that already exist, upscaling what works on the national level, encouraging cooperation, and fostering investment in useful or innovative new projects and technologies. And as we are working on making this a reality, we should not forget that the EU institutions and politicians need to play along. A public sphere needs not only debates but also a promise that what is discussed can have an actual impact.



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<sup>3</sup> Niklas Maak (2023). “Wir brauchen dringend ein europäisches Twitter”. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 July 2023. Available at <<https://bit.ly/47t3l0l>>.

# TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM AND ITS FOES

ARTICLE BY  
SÉGOLÈNE PRUVOT

While feminist movements are transnational by nature and examples of positively changing societal attitudes abound, efforts to build more inclusive societies are increasingly in the crosshairs of well-funded anti-rights networks. Achieving a truly feminist Europe requires resources, support for activists, and alliances at all levels.

**D**reaming of a feminist future for Europe could conjure up a place in which no one is left behind. One in which no one is discriminated against for reasons of gender, race, sexual orientation, physical abilities, place of birth, or nationality. A place in which those with families can be parents and have fulfilling work, where those who want a family have the means to do so, and those who don't do not have to justify why. Above all, a feminist Europe would be a place in which no violence is accepted as a means of dealing with inter-human and inter-species relationships.

Feminism is a way of understanding the world and of acting. It rejects existing forms of social organisation that subjugate women and racialised people and that exploit people, animals, and Earth's resources. It is a positioning that tries to understand, conceive of, and challenge domination. It is a way of situating oneself to be able to understand how various forms of domination and discrimination intersect. Feminism reflects on and from the position of women and women's rights, not to establish (some) women as the new dominators, but, on the contrary, to forge paths towards a world where domination is not the rule. Feminist thinkers, intellectuals, writers, artists, and activists generate the fertile ground for imagining and constructing alternative models. Feminist movements are the beehives that nurture new ways to push for alternatives.

As part of these movements, I work on building transnational linkages between feminists with initiatives such as Room to Bloom, which networks and supports feminist artists, and FIERCE, which analyses feminist and anti-gender movements in various countries.

While dreaming may be necessary, feminist movements are, above all, about doing: courageously and relentlessly paving the way for change; refusing established forms of domination; and building new practices.

## THREATS TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Unfortunately, the dream of a peaceful future based on the principles of respect, social justice, and freedom is slipping further away every day. Growing social and economic polarisation – the impact of global capitalism – combined with rising nationalism and a return to the political mainstream of previously established xenophobia and extreme-right movements are key threats to women's rights and the feminist movement.

Until recently, feminism as a social movement was seen as a thing of the past, a movement that – with the supposed triumph of equality – had lost its reason to exist.

The deflagration of the #MeToo movement in 2017 (also thanks to the flames bravely ignited

and nurtured by feminists in previous years) managed to reinstate feminism as an acceptable frame for action in the public space. By unveiling the profound reach of patriarchy in our societies, it exposed the sexist and sexual violence women and children face throughout their lives, and the illusion of equality between women and men.

#MeToo has not reinvented feminism, but it has gone some way towards changing societal attitudes towards the movement. It has blown fresh wind in the sails of feminist work throughout the world and shown it to be just and justified. It has generated hope when the reasons to despair and feel paralysed are many.

But #MeToo also happened at a time when anti-gender movements were slowly and surely gaining ground, often attacking women's rights under the pretence of defending them against what they saw as the aberrations of radical feminism.

Nationalist and extreme right movements – such as the Rassemblement National (RN) in France under Marine Le Pen and Fratelli d'Italia under Giorgia Meloni – have excelled in hijacking and reappropriating parts of feminist legacy. These have been reinvented and reinterpreted into what American author Susan Faludi has called “femotionalism”,<sup>1</sup> to target progressive feminism, reproductive rights, and migrants.

1 Susan Faludi (1992). *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. London: Vintage Books.

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This was strikingly encapsulated by Giorgia Meloni as she addressed a crowd of supporters of Spanish far-right party Vox in 2022: “Yes to the natural family, no to the LGBT lobby! Yes to sexual identity, no to gender ideology! Yes to the culture of life, no to the abyss of death! Yes to the universal values of the Cross, no to Islamist violence! Yes to secure borders, no to mass immigration!”

Just over a year after Meloni took office as Italy’s first female prime minister in October 2022, the climate has already changed for LGBTQIA+ Italian residents. In July 2023, a state prosecutor demanded that the birth certificates of 33 children born from medically assisted reproduction to lesbian couples be amended to erase the name of the second mother. This is a *modus operandi* that consists of instrumentalising anti-gender discourses to counter the idea of equality between humans, and it therefore undermines the very foundations of our democracies.

Reproductive rights are seen as a domain in which it is possible to “demonstrate” and instrumentalise what conservatives want to portray as an essential difference between humans. These ideas have a strong foundation in the Vatican’s conceptualisation of the difference between men and women. As researchers Sara Garbagnoli and Massimo Prearo highlight, a new essentialist representation of women as equal to men as humans but essentially different has been promoted by the Vatican since the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> In 1995, in a letter to bishops entitled *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II even encouraged women to promote a “new feminism” that “affirms the true genius of women” (i.e. supporting life).

The Vatican has been instrumental in creating the myth of a “gender theory” that needs to be confronted to protect life. One of the powerful coordinating networks pushing this idea is Agenda Europe, created in 2013,

2 Sara Garbagnoli & Massimo Prearo (2017). *La croisade “anti-genre”. Du Vatican au Manif pour Tous*. Paris: Éditions Textuel.

“which forms the normative framework for the fight against sexual and reproductive health and rights”.<sup>3</sup> Agenda Europe brings together more than 100 associations from more than 30 European countries.

### INTERNATIONAL ANTI-GENDER NETWORKS

The embedding of anti-feminist and anti-gender activism into a wider conservative movement across the world became evident during the Trump presidency. It is exemplified in Europe notably by the Budapest Demographic Summit, a network of nationalist, nativist, and natalist groups launched in 2015 that brings together politicians, church leaders, and so-called experts twice a year. The summit was the occasion for Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to stress “the importance of ‘family-friendly, conservative powers’” in Europe, and to present Hungary as “an incubator for conservative policies, a place where the conservative policies of the future, workable solutions, and forward-looking initiatives are being developed”.<sup>4</sup>

These transnational networks are powerful and efficient. Part of the extreme right, they are not only European but global. As a European Parliament report states, “The European Center for Law and Justice (ECLJ), led by Grégor Puppincq, has been active in anti-gender advocacy at national and European levels, as well as around the Council of Europe and United Nations bodies in Geneva, including in the homophobic protests of La Manif Pour Tous (LMPT) in France in 2013, serving as a legal focal point for the anti-abortion ECI ‘One of Us’ and playing a leading role in Agenda Europe summits.”<sup>5</sup>

3 European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (2018). “*Restoring the Natural Order: The religious extremists’ vision to mobilize European societies against human rights on sexuality and reproduction.*” 19 April 2018. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZPNX>>.

4 Euronews (2023). “Budapest demographic summit champions ‘traditional family values’”. *Euronews*. 16 September 2023. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZPRP>>.

5 European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (2021). “*Tip of the iceberg: Religious extremist funders against human rights for sexuality and reproductive health in Europe 2009-2018*”. 15 June 2021. Available at <<https://www.epfweb.org/node/837>>.

DESPITE THE OFTEN ADVERSE  
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CONTINUES TO SPRING

The ECLJ claims to act chiefly for the defence of human life from conception, against euthanasia, for traditional marriage, and for the right to conscientious objection and freedom of belief, as well as the defence of Christians in Europe and worldwide. The report also highlights Russia's leadership in the international anti-gender movement, with financial links between Russian and Western anti-gender actors, ranging from civil society organisations to parliamentarians and ministers. The St. Andrew the First-Called Foundation, for example, founded by Russian oligarch Vladimir Yakunin, has sponsored European politicians such as former French MEP Aymeric Chauprade and former Greek parliament vice-speaker Maria Kollia-Tsaroucha.

## A WIDER ATTACK

Looking beyond attacks on reproductive rights, there is a wider anti-rights campaign being conducted across Europe. A 2023 report by the Jean-Jaurès Foundation and NGO Equipop sums up the political agenda of the anti-rights movement as an attempt to change the legal and societal status quo in a way that is contrary to fundamental European rights. "Antirights movements seek to expand and further impose their reactionary vision in order to reverse sexual and reproductive rights. They

also target LGBTQIA+ rights, and, in the same vein, the Istanbul Convention, the strongest legal instrument for women's rights in terms of sexual and gender-based violence and in particular domestic and intrafamilial violence," explains the report.<sup>6</sup>

The report also argues that anti-rights movements all over the world closely imitate the strategies of feminist organisations, "such as deciding on a course of action in response to feminist discourse, obtaining financing through foundations and governments, signing joint statements and declarations".

The strength of these conservative networks and strategies opposing feminist movements – notably those advocating for an inclusive and open understanding of feminism, supportive of transgender rights and an intersectional approach – affects individuals pushing for women's rights. Whether through masculinist movements that coordinate cyberattacks, micromovements that infiltrate feminist demonstrations to discredit them (such as Collectif Némésis in France), or more political and juridical forms of silencing women's voices such as the low rate of rape prosecutions<sup>7</sup>, this backlash is taking its toll on the feminist movement.

<sup>6</sup> Equipop and Foundation Jean Jaurès (2023). "Women's rights: fighting the backlash. What role for France?". Available at <<https://bitly.ws/ZQ8X>>.

<sup>7</sup> According to France's National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, only 0.6 per cent of reported rapes or attempted rapes resulted in a conviction in 2020.

The term “backlash” is controversial, but I believe that it conveys the violence and strength of movements opposing progress towards gender equality as well as the impact this has on feminist movements. Burnout is a widespread issue in the activism world, to which feminists appear particularly vulnerable, especially because women’s movements are acutely underfunded. Most are fully reliant on volunteer work, and individual activists often face violent attacks and threats, online and offline.

## **REASONS FOR HOPE**

Despite the often adverse political and societal contexts, hope continues to spring. Heart-warming success stories show that societal views of women’s rights do not necessarily follow the routes set by the most conservative political forces in Europe.

One of the main triumphs of the past decades was Ireland’s referendum on abortion in 2018, in which almost 70 per cent voted in favour of legalisation – achieved in a deeply Catholic country that previously banned all forms of abortion. Indeed, the result reveals a generational divide: according to an Ipsos MRBI survey, 87 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds and 83 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds voted to legalise abortion, while 60 per cent of over 65s voted against. This may be a sign of a wider societal evolution regarding gender roles and reproductive rights.

The strength of feminist mobilisation against the ban on abortion in Poland is another striking example. In 2016, more than 100,000 women came out onto the streets in the “Black Protests”. The movement grew into the Women’s Strike in 2020, when the government proposed to push forward the most restrictive legislation on abortion in Europe. The impact of the protests later reached parliament, with the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party losing its majority in October 2023. In its post-election press release, the Women’s Strike

PROGRESS  
IN ONE COUNTRY  
STIMULATES  
FEMINIST  
MOVEMENTS  
ACROSS BORDERS

describes this as “the largest scale protests since the fall of communism in Poland – 100 days in over 600 cities. This time it was the young generation that took to the streets, as every one in three persons aged 18 to 29 took to the protests”. As the press release highlights, the fact that women and young people went to vote was decisive: the turnout for women reached a record high of 73.2 per cent (12 per cent higher than the previous election) and turnout for young people was at 68.8 per cent (over 22 per cent higher than the previous election).

Positive change has also come from within governments. In the European political landscape today, it is Spain that raises the bar when it comes to women’s rights. Since 2017 it has invested in fighting against gender-based violence. Former Equality Minister Irene Montero has passed legislation including the introduction of menstrual leave for women, free period products and mandatory sexuality education in schools, changes around consent with the “only yes means yes” law in 2022 (which states that consent has to be expressed and that any non-consensual sexual activity is rape), and legislation expanding abortion and transgender rights for teenagers in 2023.

The mobilisation of the Spanish women’s football team (and of society at large) in the wake of one of the players being forcibly kissed on the mouth during the celebration of their World Cup win in the summer shows that these laws have changed the terms of the debate, even though the attempts to ignore these changes have proved strong.

Progress in one country – particularly when that country is perceived as Catholic and conservative such as Ireland or Spain – stimulates feminist movements across borders. Feminist movements are transnational by nature and empower one another. International solidarity has powered protests throughout the world such as the Polish Black Protests from 2016 onwards, Iranian women’s movements, and Argentina’s movement against gender-based violence Ni Una Menos, which started in 2015 and has since spread to countries including Spain and Italy.

Feminist movements have appropriated tools to denounce injustice and raise their voices across borders: from the national versions of #MeToo and the worldwide spread of the Chilean song *Un violador en tu camino* (“A rapist in your path”, also known as “The rapist is you”) to the feminist collages denouncing femicides appearing in cities around the world.

In Europe, the spaces for networking and connecting are numerous. Between 2007 to 2012, eight different feminist networks operated the European Feminist Forum (EFF), a web-based space for dialogue. Today, there are many opportunities for encounter and common work, from feminist festivals such as City of Women in Slovenia, Femi Festival in Denmark, Fem Fest in the Netherlands, and WeToo in France, to more political organisations such as the feminist forums of progressive EU Parliament groups and plans for an in-person European Feminist Forum by the WIDE+ network.

As feminist movements often operate on volunteers’ time and with limited funding, mobilising the resources to build strong, lasting transnational networks remains a challenge – especially when local and national work already pushes activists and organisations to their limits.

Those who are working to build a feminist Europe, effect societal change, and forge new paths should not be left alone to face the efficient and well-funded nationalist and extreme right movements. Feminist movements are a space of support and creation and often of joy and freedom. To effect serious social change, they will need funding but also strong support and alliances from within political parties and at local, national, and European levels.

A small step towards a feminist Europe would be to hold those elected at the upcoming EU Parliament elections to any promises of being allies of feminism. A transnational feminist movement should be able to develop, promote, and defend a feminist stance in all the EU’s pri-

ority areas: from the European Green Deal to the European Pillar of Social Rights; from energy and housing policy to innovation and science; supporting those most at risk of poverty and discrimination. The organisation of a European Feminist Forum, providing a space for transnational organising and for analysis and proposals on EU policy areas, could be a first step.

The 2022 French documentary *We Are Coming* follows a group of young women on their journey to becoming feminists and acting upon their convictions. It showcases some of the strengths feminist movements can build on at a time when interest in feminism has been revived: personal and collective journeys rooted in research; discussions on practical day-to-day issues; sharing frustration and despair but also joy, fun, and support; exchanges with others in a safe environment; and working with other movements. In the dream of a feminist Europe, one would build on such energies and give them space to transform our societies towards more openness, experimentation, respect, and freedom in order to better confront the anti-liberal forces attacking the foundation of our rights and democracies.

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### SÉGOLÈNE PRUVOT

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# THE ETERNAL MIGRANT?

## ROMA BELONGING IN EUROPE

ARTICLE BY

**LUIZA MEDELEANU**

In spite of their long history in Europe and status as its largest ethnic minority, Roma continue to be seen as the “perpetual foreigner” and have suffered violence, marginalisation, and exclusion. A real sense of belonging for Europe’s Roma can only be built on an acknowledgement of the power relations at play.

**A**lthough the Roma have been in Europe since at least the 11th century,<sup>1</sup> they are often seen as the eternal migrant or “stranger” as described by German sociologist Georg Simmel.<sup>2</sup> They live next to us, but we don’t really know them; they are near and far at the same time. And what we think we know – picked up from media portrayals and fleeting encounters – is often nothing more than stereotypes and prejudices.

In his 2012 article “Europe invents the Gypsies: The dark side of modernity”, literary theorist Klaus-Michael Bogdal argues that, as the Roma were unable to write their own story, it was written by others – whose perceptions strongly coloured the narrative. He believes that the Roma are a modern European invention, and that the image representing them is marred by distortion. In his 2007 book *Roma in Europe*, sociologist and Roma expert Jean-Pierre Liégeois notes that attitudes towards the Roma can be defined by a measure of “romantic sympathy”, but that the most negative stereotypes are revived as soon as social tension arises. Widespread beliefs about Roma communities may be equally distorted. The view that the Roma lead a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle is often unjustified, as many Roma are now in fact settled, while allegations linking Roma culture to a general disregard for rules belie the fact that Roma life is governed by complex norms of social behaviour.

1 Gheorghe Sarău (1997). *Rromii, India și Limba Rromani*, București: Editura Kriterion, p. 26.

2 Georg Simmel (1908). *Soziologie: Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*. Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, p.1.

## OTHERING AND SUBVERSION

In an attempt to explain the lack of Roma belonging to the non-Roma societies with which they live, Romanian cultural anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu identifies three elements of the “Roma condition”. The first is the Roma relationship to the land. Mihăilescu states that there are no examples of significant numbers of Roma having become peasants or farmers, with their roots and resources depending on the land. This caused the Roma to be perceived as an “absolute Other” by local residents. Mihăilescu proposes that Roma mobility was actually driven by the search for livelihood resources. In addition, he refers to the period of Roma enslavement on the territory of present-day Romania (discussed in more detail below), when most Roma led a sedentary life, and posits that nomadism was invented by the “host societies” and functioned as an explicit or implicit operator of social categorisation and stigmatisation.

The next element of the “Roma condition” is their relationship to space. Space in general, and the land in particular, does not offer the Roma a sense of identification or of belonging. Not subscribing to a “cult of territory”, the Roma have no qualms about violating other people’s property interests and are therefore prepared to settle on any available land. Being deprived of land and disinterested in it, the Roma refer to another category of resources

– namely their own crafts, from which they earn a daily living. Mihăilescu notes that this often made the Roma an integral part of their “host societies” and their economic functioning – meaning that the social inclusion of the Roma was much deeper than is generally believed.

The third element of the “Roma condition” is their relationship to property. Aside from rare exceptions, the Roma tended not to accumulate significant property; their most valuable possessions were usually transported by cart. As a result, their economic activity was predominantly orientated towards survival rather than growth. This led to the idea of the Roma having an “economy of waste”, which significantly contributed to the reproduction of their marginal status.

Interestingly, Mihăilescu suggests that these three elements – a lack of attachment to place, a lack of property ownership, and the practice of an economy of services offered on a peripatetic basis depending on the opportunities available – facilitate a kind of rite of reversal that, by presenting a mirror image of non-Roma society, turns the explicit domination of host societies on its head and allows the subversion of the status quo.

THE ABOLITION  
OF SLAVERY WAS  
THE MOST  
IMPORTANT  
SOCIAL EVENT  
IN THE MODERN  
HISTORY  
OF ROMANIA

## SLAVERY, EMANCIPATION, AND WESTWARD MIGRATION

According to specialist on minority and marginalised communities Aidan McGarry,<sup>3</sup> the construction of mainstream identity usually designates an outsider – someone who does not belong – as a foil. A social space is constructed, and those deigned not to belong are positioned outside it, both physically and conceptually. In Europe, Roma are placed outside the space belonging to non-Roma, both physically and conceptually, and are construed as a threat to Europeans.

The most egregious example of exclusion is represented by the enslavement of the Roma on the territory of present-day Romania from at least 1385 until 1856. Not only did this place the Roma outside society; it excluded them from the category of the human. Slaves were like things: they could be bought and sold, gifted, bequeathed, dowried, and given in lieu of debt. As in the US, following the abolition of Roma slavery in 1855-1856, the two Romanian principalities offered compensation to the owners for the economic losses suffered but not to the slaves themselves.

Romani historian Petre Petcuț<sup>4</sup> states that the abolition of slavery was the most important social event in the modern history of Romania. It triggered two long-lasting phenomena: state attempts to integrate/assimilate these new citizens – still unfinished – and dramatic inequality between the emancipated and the rest of the population. Superficial abolitionist policies, ostensibly aimed at integrating former slaves into society, instead created a distinct citizen group. Many people were simply thrown onto the street and forced to become vagrants, populations were displaced, and whole groups became stateless.

<sup>3</sup> Aidan McGarry (2017). *Romaphobia: The Last Acceptable Form of Racism*. London: Zed Books.

<sup>4</sup> Petre Petcuț (2015). *Romii: Slavie și libertate: Construirea și emanciparea unei noi categorii etnice și sociale la nord de Dunăre*. București: Centrul Național de Cultură a Romilor, p. 10.

Former slaves were excluded from land ownership, making it difficult for them to settle permanently and find a place in Romanian society. Petcuț gives the example of an emancipated blacksmith who was the only resident of a village who had not been given land. As a result, he was unable to supplement his family's income through agriculture; at most, he and his family could have worked as day labourers. The descendants of this family, who were also landless, were obliged to continue in the family profession. As a result of this type of politics, the Roma remain in a kind of social periphery on the edges of Romanian rural society.

Another important phenomenon triggered by Roma emancipation was a migration wave of primarily nomadic Roma to Western Europe. As a result of poor knowledge of Roma culture and practices, these nomads became the target of permanent pressure, subject to control and suspected of crimes or illegality. The conflation of the nomad with the delinquent by public authorities and within public opinion became more and more frequent in the countries of Europe – with the Roma accused of robbing villages, trespassing, and kidnapping children – and still persists.

Petre Petcuț<sup>5</sup> describes the figure of the “threatening nomadic gypsy” who becomes an indeterminate image in a world dominated by political violence and racism, where legends

and monsters meet. He underlines that the representation of the “gypsy nomad” who steals, kidnaps children, or even rapes and murders is the result of popular cultural consumption as opposed to posing a real danger for the majority community, emphasising that Roma mobility is primarily linked to the practice of their profession or craft.

## SYSTEMS OF CONTROL, EXPULSION, AND GENOCIDE

From the beginning of the 20th century, Roma mobility became an international issue in Europe. Nationalism and xenophobia began to influence the parameters of mobility of Roma groups. The mutual expulsions that took place between France and Belgium, France and Switzerland, and France and Italy demonstrated the extent of anti-Roma sentiments and were accompanied by the development of an even more rigorous system of surveillance and control of nomadic Roma groups. Switzerland proposed the establishment of a commission with supra-national powers responsible for the “Gypsy problem” at the European level, but this initiative failed – mainly due to Italy, which considered the Roma as belonging exclusively to the states of central Europe and the Balkans, but also due to the refusal to “nationalise” the Roma by other states, caught in a maelstrom of nationalism and anxiety towards foreigners.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Petre Petcuț (2022). “Regimul administrativ al nomazilor în România și în Franța. 1856-1938”, in Adrian-Nicolae Furtună (ed.), *Culegere de Studii Rome*. București: Editura Centrului de Cultură a Romilor, pp.166-209.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.188.

Following the outbreak of World War II, the situation markedly worsened. In 1940, the German police began to deport Roma from Nazi Germany and Austria to German-occupied Poland – primarily to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where a “Gypsy Family Camp” (*Zigeunerfamilienlager*) was established in February 1943. By the end of 1943, 18,736 Roma lived in the camp, of whom around 9,500 were under the age of fifteen. Almost 400 children were born there.<sup>7</sup>

In total, around 21,000 Roma from 12 countries are thought to have been killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The same fate was shared by Roma interned in other concentration camps. Many others were victims of the so-called *Einsatzgruppen* – mobile paramilitary death squads that executed both individual Jews and Roma and entire communities. The exact number of Roma who were killed in this way is not known, but it is estimated that there are 180 mass graves in Ukraine, Belarus, the former Yugoslavia, and Poland.<sup>8</sup> Scholars including Angus Frazer, Jean-Pierre Liégeois, and Ian Hancock estimate that at least half a million Roma from all over Europe died during what has come to be known as the Roma Holocaust.

On 15 April 2015, the European Parliament adopted a resolution recognising the genocide and establishing 2 August as European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day. The date was chosen in remembrance of the massacre of the almost 3000 Roma men, women, and children that remained in the Gypsy Family Camp by SS troops on the night of 2 August 1944. (According to some sources, the number of deaths was over 4000.) However, the road to acknowledgement was not easy: the Roma had to fight to be recognised as victims of the Holocaust. They had been excluded from the Nuremberg trials on the grounds that their persecution was based on social rather than racial criteria, as was the case with the Jews.

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<sup>7</sup> Sławomir Kaprański, Maria Martyniak & Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska (2011). *Voices of Memory 7: Roma in Auschwitz*. Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

THE ROMA  
GENOCIDE IS RARELY  
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INVESTIGATED

On Good Friday 1980, in a desperate attempt to move the German state to recognise the persecution of Roma on racial grounds, Roma rights activists led by Romani Rose – head of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma since its foundation – resorted to a hunger strike. In March 1982, thanks to their efforts, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt officially recognised the genocide and stressed the obligation to compensate the victims. Roma victims of the Holocaust began to receive compensation payments in the mid-1980s.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of these efforts, the Roma genocide is rarely mentioned in public discourse and has not yet been sufficiently investigated. Researchers in this field focus primarily on its administrative and organisational aspects, highlighting the role of local authorities in categorising and deporting Roma, and give less emphasis to the thinking that underpinned this Europe-wide campaign of ethnic cleansing.

## ROMAPHOBIA IN TODAY'S EUROPE

Romaphobia continues to be widespread in Europe, with Roma stigmatised en masse as criminals. In France, for example, the government decided to deport Roma migrants that held the citizenship of other EU countries in summer 2010 – sometimes by force. This campaign was accompanied by anti-Roma rhetoric, with the entire Roma community being accused of criminal behaviour. Another example is the unfortunate language used by some candidates in the Italian elections in 2008, which resulted in ugly incidents of violence against the Roma and their camps. Likewise, the killing of six Roma, including a 5-year-old child, in Hungary was committed in an atmosphere inflamed by hate speech.

The Roma have remained the outsiders, the scapegoats of Europe who are blamed in times of crisis when no one is willing to take responsi-

<sup>9</sup> "Bürgerrechtsbewegung der Sinti und Roma". Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma. Available at <<https://bitly.ws/32cgE>>.

**THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC  
POLICIES FOR ROMA IN  
EUROPEAN SOCIETY TO  
DATE HAS BEEN LIMITED**

bility for the situation. The most recent example is the Covid-19 pandemic, during which hate speech and incitement to hatred against the Roma – and even acts of violence against them – noticeably increased.

The history of the Roma in the European space is one of violence, marginalisation, and exclusion. They were considered inferior and were exploited. Over the centuries, a whole set of images developed, crystallising collective stereotypes without taking into account the power relations that formed between Roma and non-Roma.

## **POLICY INITIATIVES AND POWER RELATIONS**

In order to improve the status of the Roma and to give them equal rights as European citizens, numerous policy initiatives have been launched over the past 25 years. The most promising were the national strategies for the Roma developed by the governments of the candidates for accession to the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe, the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 initiated by the World Bank and the Open Society Institute, and the EU Roma strategic framework on equality, inclusion and participation. The last of these was consolidated and reformed on 7 October 2020. In comparison to the previous framework, which focused on the socio-economic integration of the Roma without taking

into account their cultural specificity, it establishes a more complex approach to the Roma issue at the European level.

According to the new framework, all Roma should have the opportunity to realise their full potential and get involved in political, social, economic, and cultural life. This new approach puts a stronger focus on diversity among Roma to ensure that national strategies respond to the specific needs of different groups, including Roma women, young people, children, mobile EU citizens, stateless persons, LGBTQIA+ people, and Roma elderly and disabled people. The European framework encourages an intersectional approach, taking into account how different aspects of identity can be combined to combat discrimination. It also pays more attention to measures that provide for a policy-level approach to the issue of Roma inclusion, alongside specific actions aimed at favouring their effective equal access to rights and services.

However, the impact of public policies for Roma in European society to date has been limited. One of the reasons for this, notes Roma expert Iulius Rostaş, is that these policies do not adequately take into account the crucial importance of ethnic identity as an essential causative factor in the social exclusion and marginalisation of Roma. In order to reduce these gaps and ensure that public policies regarding the Roma are fit for purpose, the history of power relations between Roma and

non-Roma and the exclusion of the Roma must be taken into account. Power must be shared<sup>10</sup> so that it belongs equally to all – including the Roma. Only this way will they feel a real sense of belonging to Europe – as European citizens with all of the associated rights, not just the oldest “migrants from Europe”, the perpetual foreigners.

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<sup>10</sup> Iulius Rostaş (2020). *O muncă de sisif. De ce eşuează politicile europene pentru romi*. Bucureşti: Editura Centrului Romilor, p.VI.

# EUROPE'S CHOICES CAN SAVE OR FAIL THE CLIMATE

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AN INTERVIEW WITH  
**FRANÇOIS GEMENNE**

A growing proportion of emissions will come from outside Europe. So while the EU is currently focused on decarbonising itself, its resources should also be wielded globally. And from an urgent need for adaptation to a backlash against the European Green Deal, its own house is not fully in order. François Gemenne on how the EU and its Green parties can shift strategy externally and internally.

**GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL:** How will the impacts of the climate crisis change Europe in the next decades?

**FRANÇOIS GEMENNE:** That depends most of all on the decisions being taken right now in Cairo, Jakarta, Lagos, Mexico City, and Delhi. At least for the second half of this century, Europe's climate future will depend not on what Europe does but on the development path taken by the countries of the Global South.

The problem is that Europe today is too focused on itself and not enough on the decisions being taken in Cairo and Jakarta. European countries, of course, have absolutely no right or legitimacy to tell these countries how they should develop. We cannot tell any country to keep their fossil fuels in the ground. But we need to work much more closely with them than we do currently. Europe's priority needs to be stimulating investments in their energy transitions and increasing access to low-carbon technologies globally. If we don't, they'll tap into fossil resources to fuel their development.

**So Europe needs to be thinking about a global green transition rather than becoming the “world’s first climate-neutral continent”, as the EU Commission has boasted?**

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Europe thinks that it will lead by example on climate change and all the other countries of the world will follow. But it doesn’t work like that, especially in the current geopolitical context where the European model is not seen favourably. Many countries – I’m thinking of some African governments, for example – see renewable energies as a way for Europe to maintain dominance over countries of the Global South.

Very often Europe and other industrialised countries think that they should do their share, and that their share is limited to the proportion of greenhouse gas emissions that they represent. This approach will never work. By 2030, Europe will represent around 12 per cent of emissions. By 2050 it will be less than five per cent. There is no point in Europe becoming a decarbonised island in a sea of carbon. But if Europe doesn’t pay attention, this is what will happen.

**Enabling climate action globally is therefore not about altruism but is very much in Europe’s interest. What levers does Europe have at its disposal?**

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For developing countries to be able to pursue a different development path, we need to offer some alternatives. At the moment, investments

in low-carbon energy in the Global South remain dramatically low. Europe should commit to working with countries around the world to grow these investments.

Europe has plenty of money, investors, major banks, and technology: it has the levers at its disposal. The problem is that Europe is focused on developing climate technologies for itself. It is the same with nuclear energy and artificial intelligence. It is not enough to improve European energy systems. It is crucial to make these technologies available across the world.

**To what extent are countries and global leaders rallying around climate issues?**

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The simple existence of the COP (the annual United Nations global conference on climate) and the Paris Agreement is testament to the fact that countries around the world have rallied around what they perceive as a global issue that needs to be addressed collectively. All countries agreed to do something and made a formal commitment to do so, even if what has followed has proved insufficient. What isn’t clear is how the divisions of geopolitics right now will play into the climate negotiations. At the time of the Paris Agreement in 2015, the global community was much less divided than it is today. I doubt the Paris Agreement could be successfully negotiated today.

**THERE IS NO POINT  
IN EUROPE BECOMING  
A DECARBONISED ISLAND  
IN A SEA OF CARBON**

You can complain that COPs are too heavy and too costly or that they emit too much carbon and are held in Dubai surrounded by lobbyists. But that gathering remains a small miracle.

**If Europe wants to develop its climate diplomacy, should it be investing more political energy in COPs or should it focus on different smaller initiatives?**

Bilateral or smaller multilateral initiatives are not contrary to the existence of COPs. Alliances between countries, but also companies and civil society organisations, are the most efficient ways for COPs to move forward. COPs should be judged not just by the consensus reached by governments but also by the other initiatives that are enabled to flourish. Here, Europe can be an example. If the European Union had waited around for unanimity before introducing the euro, we'd still be paying with Belgian francs. Instead, what paved the way for the euro was a smaller coalition of countries moving forward, with others joining progressively. We need to let the pioneers speed ahead rather than wait for the laggards.

**Going back to climate impacts, how will they transform Europe?**

There will be an increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as flash floods, droughts, and heatwaves, and a truly

major shift in the climate overall. Brussels will enjoy the climate of Lyon today, while Lyon will have the climate of Tunis or Rabat. Stockholm will have a climate comparable to the climate of Brussels today. What we will see is a shift northward, which will have an impact on agriculture as well. These shifts will require responses across the board, from rethinking the EU's Common Agricultural Policy to new measures to protect working conditions and maintain productivity, as well as protection from new risks to infrastructure.

**What does Europe need to do to adapt to the changing climate?**

For a long time, Europe thought that it was immune to the impacts of climate change. That it was in a way invulnerable, that adaptation was for countries of the Global South, and that the task of Europe was to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. Now we know otherwise.

Europe will not be spared climate impacts, and it is increasingly clear that it is wildly unprepared: floods in Belgium and Germany in 2021; fires and drought in France in 2022; fires and floods in Greece this year. We have seen how extreme weather events soon get out of control, and how capacities such as basic equipment and training are lacking.

Adapting the European continent is also not only about climate extremes. We will need to

invest in infrastructure against sea level rises, work with farmers to transform agricultural processes, and help industries transition and secure their supply chains. On adaptation, Europe also needs to realise that there are many lessons to learn from the Global South, which has been thinking about some of these problems for much longer.

### **Four years into the European Green Deal, how would you evaluate it overall?**

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There have been drawbacks, but, overall, it's been ambitious and rather successful. The Green Deal is an opportunity to craft a new model for the European economy. Today, however, the Green Deal is facing a populist backlash, which European institutions should be taking much more seriously. Many people, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, perceive the Green Deal as a constraint rather than an opportunity.

If the EU is keen on transforming the Green Deal into the impetus for a new economic model, it needs to communicate more effectively so people see something other than red tape and regulations. Of course, some of the shortcomings of the Green Deal are the result of political compromises and negotiations. But a huge effort needs to be made in terms of publicity. If not, the danger is that the real backlash against environmental politics will put the Green Deal at risk and then the whole building comes tumbling down.

### **The Greens have been struggling with this pushback against environmental politics. Why are they particularly vulnerable?**

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Green parties were formed around consensus, around a diagnosis: the environmental situation was bad, and something had to be done. But when it comes to what needs to be done and especially to the linkage of environmental policy with social and economic policy, there is a lack of consensus in Green parties. There is a paradox that you would expect Green parties to do better when the situation looks worse.

EUROPE WILL  
NOT BE SPARED  
CLIMATE  
IMPACTS,  
AND IT IS  
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UNPREPARED

But the reality is the exact opposite, because many of their preferred solutions are seen as top-down and insufficiently linked with economic and social measures.

There is also the fact that where the Greens have been in government, they haven't achieved much. In Belgium, the Greens have the transport, energy, and environment ministries. As a Belgian citizen, I have not seen much of a transformation aside from some interesting initiatives at the local level. In Germany, Robert Habeck set up a giant ministry that brought together the economy ministry and the climate ministry. What we have seen are new coal mines and other policies that the electorate has struggled to understand. We've ended up with climate activists campaigning against a government where Greens play a major role.

**If the green transition is at risk because it is perceived as an imposition, how can it be made more desirable?**

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For now, to convince people of the need for climate action, we have focused a lot on what would happen if action is not taken. We have focused on disastrous visions of what Europe would look like. The problem is, people know very well that there is a long gap between the emissions at a given time in a given place and the impacts at a given time in a given place. People know that impacts in Europe depend on past emissions and on emissions in China and the US as much as on anything that Europe can do today. So it is wrong to try and prompt people into action by emphasising what can go wrong.

I think that the way to prompt action is to show people why it is in their best interest. For that, you need to make climate action visible to people, with major investments in public transport and in renewables infrastructure to make energy bills cheaper.

YOU NEED TO  
 MAKE CLIMATE  
 ACTION VISIBLE  
 TO PEOPLE,  
 WITH MAJOR  
 INVESTMENTS  
 IN PUBLIC  
 TRANSPORT AND  
 IN RENEWABLES

### Do we need to take inspiration from US President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act?

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What is interesting about Biden's plan is that it is successful precisely because it is not labelled as the Climate Action Plan but the Inflation Reduction Act. Many people perceive climate action as something they don't want, but everyone is concerned about inflation. When people see that the Inflation Reduction Act brings new jobs to the American economy and builds new infrastructure, then Biden can say, "Look, see how climate action is in your best interest." Tragically, Europe had to wait for the war in Ukraine to realise the importance of a European vision for energy policy.

### Climate action will cost a lot of public money, and there are already plenty of demands on government spending. How should we finance the green transition?

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We should do more to mobilise private money. Europeans have a lot of savings in banks. In France, the total amount of household savings is between 4000 and 6000 billion euros. It's huge – the equivalent of around five per cent of global GDP just in French savings. If the EU Commission were to provide some bonds or major opportunities for investment, I'm pretty sure that Europeans would be willing to contribute and put their money to good use.

### Environmental movements have long rallied against megaprojects and the environmental damage that comes with large infrastructure projects. Do we now need an environmentalism that builds?

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In French, we say that you cannot have "le beurre et l'argent du beurre". It's the equivalent of the English saying: "You can't have your cake and eat it." We need to accept that climate action will require massive infrastructure projects, and that there will sometimes need to be a balance between climate policies and biodiversity policies. For the Greens this

means not just saying that we need to ground planes or phase out cars. Green thinking needs to stop focusing on the world they don't want and show what the world we do want looks like.

**What do you think about climate policies that target the disproportionate carbon consumption of wealthy people, such as banning private jets or restrictions on SUV drivers?**

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These policies make a lot of activists feel good about themselves because they reinforce the idea that you are fighting the good fight. The effect for most people is to reinforce the idea that climate action means limitations and restrictions. When people hear that climate activists want to ban jets, cars, even golf, they think, "What's next? Am I next? Is meat next?" All these slogans create anxiety and mean lost votes and less support in public debates. They are not about convincing people about the benefits of the transition.

I don't think we should ban private jets for business people. We should make high-speed trains more attractive. The Greens love night trains. But I travel a lot for work, and I'm not going to take night trains and neither are most business people. I have kids at home and I already work a lot, so I'm not going to spend a night away if there is an easier option. Paris to Berlin by night train is not for businesspeople, it's for young people. Paris to Berlin in six hours by high-speed train with high-speed internet – that will appeal to business people.

We need to cater to different groups when we think about train policies, and we need to do the same with all policies. Sometimes it seems like the Greens are too eager to please their core electorate. We need to think more about reaching out to people from different social classes.

If you think that by bashing the rich, you are going to attract the working class, it's not true. Most people want to do well. They want to be rich. By attacking the rich, you appeal most to the upper middle

**WE NEED TO THINK MORE  
ABOUT REACHING OUT  
TO PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT  
SOCIAL CLASSES**

class – the people who already have enough money and know that they are probably never going to make much more than that anyhow.

**How did the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis change the climate question in Europe?**

The war in Ukraine provided a way to reconcile those concerned with the end of the world with those concerned about the end of the month. Suddenly, that dilemma between climate action and affordability no longer existed. The dilemma was not solved. It was just eliminated.

In many respects, it is easiest to convince people of the core benefits of climate action when you are looking at it through a different lens. With more renewable energy capacity, Europe would have never been in the crisis situation we were in the year after the war in Ukraine escalated. Many people who are not sociologically close to the Greens or who simply aren't that concerned about the environment realise that as well. The same logic could be the starting point internationally too. Europe needs to develop its green diplomacy, and I think that there is so much potential there.

**What should be at the centre of the European Green Deal after 2024?**

First, public investments. So far, the Green Deal has been mostly about regulation. It is only with investments in public services, transport,

and infrastructure that people will realise that climate action is in their best interest. We need to make sure that climate action offers something more than restrictions, taxes, and cuts.

Second, Europe needs to make the Green Deal visible to people. People across Europe need to know what the Green Deal is doing for them. They need to know that the new train station is paid for by the Green Deal.

Public investments, properly communicated across Europe, can convince people that the Green Deal is something for them.



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# ALIGNING STARS

ROUTES TO A DIFFERENT EUROPE

The European project is simultaneously advancing and fraying. In recent years, the EU has responded with unity to multiple shocks, from the pandemic to the climate emergency and the war in Ukraine, reviving the adage that Europe is “forged in crises”. However, its crisis management continues to be technocratic, and the rightward shift of many member states is mirrored in an increasingly identitarian Union, entrenched in defence of its own privileges. In the context of a newly found appetite for EU enlargement and with crucial elections just months away, progressives need to outline what kind of Europe they are striving for. By examining the continent’s past and present, this edition sets out to explore possible routes towards a desirable future.

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