



## Coronavirus: A new beginning for Europe and the Left

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The coronavirus pandemic opens a new era for Europe and the world. This comes at a time when our Union reaches its 70th anniversary - since the Schuman Declaration that launched the first Community on the 9th of May 1950. Like 70 years ago, our ambition and resolve today must meet the challenges we are facing now.

The health emergency and its social, financial and economic consequences strengthen the case for further European integration, but also the urgent need for a robust comeback of multilevel progressive policies in Europe and beyond. **Systemic crisis are always opportunities for positive radical change, but such moments could also be hijacked by right-wing politicians, authoritarian instincts and nationalistic mind-sets.** To a certain extent that was the case in the aftermath of the Euro crisis of 2010. But, as progressives, we cannot allow this possibility to materialise.

This is because the crisis only underlines the need for strong public administrations at all levels, including welfare States and robust investments in public health, expansionary fiscal and monetary policies to prevent an economic and social depression, as well as multilateral cooperation.

At the European level, we need additional tools and further integration in order to effectively tackle all sorts of emergencies - such as pandemics and natural disasters – in a coordinated way and in a spirit of financial solidarity.



**The frequency of environmental, natural, and pandemic-related crisis makes a serious review of the Maastricht dogmas necessary:** regarding the reasonability of balanced budgets, independent central banking, and the prohibition of monetary financing of governments, at least in moments of extraordinary circumstances.

European decision-making, centred on a European Council working by consensus, shows its weaknesses daily, but these weaknesses become more acute in times of financial, natural, or public health emergencies.

Thus, the European Union must not repeat the mistakes of the Euro crisis. **It is not time for austerity policies nor for national or intergovernmental solutions, but for a more social and federal Europe.** This is what the European Progressive family is fighting for.

In this regard, the expected **European Recovery Plan**, initially proposed by then Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and the S&D Group, is a very positive development. It is to be financed by a large issuance of long-term Union bonds and to be implemented through the EU budget. It is critical that Member States are not further indebted in their efforts to support the income of companies and workers.

In the medium term, **we need to complement this potentially ground-breaking economic plan at the European level with a constitutional reform of our Union**, in order to make it more effective, democratic, social, and ecological. Therefore, we need to reform our institutions and enlarge the policy catalogue at the European level.

In 2009, the Lisbon Treaty entered into force. It was a huge advance in the political integration of the Union. Thanks to the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament codecides together with the Council in more than 40 new policy areas. We have the European External Action Service and the permanent Presidency of the European Council among other important aspects.

However, the world of 2020 is radically different from the global and domestic environment Europe faced just 10 years ago. During the 'Lisbon Decade', we experienced the Euro crisis, the increase of poverty and social precariousness due to the austerity programs and as a result, the rise of national populism. China has become not just an industrial powerhouse but also a formidable



geopolitical actor. Furthermore, instability in our near abroad has become the norm, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Arab Spring, and the civil wars in Syria and Libya which produced unprecedented levels of migration. The narrow victory of Brexit in the 2016 referendum and the election of Donald Trump in the United States have added great uncertainty to the political scene. In these ten years, other trends have accelerated, such as the climatic crisis and the digitalisation of the economy. **All these developments have given birth to a disruptive international order**, compounded in early 2020 by the effects of the health-mandated social and economic shutdown.

This is our brave new world. It is affected by frequent crisis of ecological or biological nature and dominated by geopolitical competition. There are assertive continental powers such as Russia, China or the United States who act in contempt of the rules-based order established since 1945, or engage in open propaganda, disinformation, or cyberwar campaigns. **It is imperative for us to be more united at home, in order to be stronger abroad, and to shape a globalised and interdependent world according to multilateral instruments and our values and interests.** Particularly, Europe must be the leading force in a push to strengthen and reform the UN system, 75 years after its establishment, including the introduction of a Parliamentary Assembly and the overdue reform of the UN Charter.

Institutionally, we need to be more effective and democratic when taking decisions. It is unavoidable to fully exploit -but also to update - the Lisbon Treaty, in order to forge a federal political Union. The rule of unanimity in foreign policy, taxation, the multi-annual budget, and social affairs is paralysing Europe. **We must introduce qualified majority vote in Council in all policy fields, and a stronger European Parliament with full co-decision powers** (particularly on taxation, own resources and Multiannual Financial Framework), **and the right of legislative initiative and of inquiry.** We must introduce transnational lists to make the *Spitzenkandidat* principle a reality.

From the policy perspective, the economic architecture of the euro is yet to be completed (European Deposit Insurance and a strong Euro area budget). A stronger single currency is also needed in the context of the role of Europe in world. Furthermore, **as Social Democrats, we must also fight for the constitutionalisation of a public health union, the climate neutrality objectives and the social pillar.**

This, I believe, is the program we should defend as Social Democrats in the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe. This Conference shall be a transparent instrument in order to make the voice of ordinary citizens and organised civil society heard. The European Parliament has



proposed in its resolution approved on January 15 of 2020 a broad institutional representation, in which MEPs are on an equal footing with the Council and the Member States, while ensuring the participation of citizens and the social partners. **The mandate of the Conference must be open, therefore, including the possibility of reforming the Treaties and agreeing to a new federal constitutional pact.**

This conference is a unique opportunity to build the political, social and ecological Europe that we desperately need. It is up to the larger European social-democratic family, in cooperation with other social and political progressive forces, to make sure that - unlike in 2010 - the 2020 crisis becomes a chance for a more united and social Europe, in a better and a fairer world.

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## About the publication

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