



**2024 Framework Activity Programme  
of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies  
(FEPS)**

**Year 2024**

**FOR THE PRIMACY OF THE  
PROGRESSIVE POLITICS IN EUROPE  
In 2024 and beyond**

**Brussels, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

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The FEPS (Foundation for European Progressive Studies) Framework Activity Programme (FAP) is a comprehensive document, which is adopted annually by the FEPS General Assembly (FEPS GA). It defines the overarching objectives for all the Foundation's activities in the year to come, remaining in accordance with Article 4 of the FEPS Statutes. The text is being developed in a transparent, inclusive, and participatory process that ensures that the FAP remains in sync with the agenda of the European Progressive Family (Party of European Socialists, Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament, PES Group in CoR), as also that it meets the criteria of representativity for the FEPS member foundations. In its final version, the document serves as the basis of the application for the grant upon the call from the European Parliament. Then it provides the guidelines for the FEPS Work Plan and for the subsequent calls for project proposals.

The FEPS Framework Activity Programme 2024 has been drafted following a procedure that was explained in the note discussed at the FEPS Management level on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The steps leading to Draft 01 presented herewith included: the announcement of the process to the FEPS Bureau (30<sup>th</sup> March 2023), discussion regarding key priorities by the FEPS Scientific Council (14<sup>th</sup> April), and deliberations within the context of FEPS Strategic Seminar involving Core Team and FEPS Secretariat Team (10<sup>th</sup> May). Draft 01 of this document was adopted unanimously by the FEPS Bureau (1<sup>st</sup> June 2023) and also unanimously by the FEPS General Assembly (16<sup>th</sup> June 2023). The current version was developed with the inputs of FEPS Members and FEPS Team members. Herewith is being presented to the FEPS Bureau for adoption (27<sup>th</sup> September 2023).

## I | FEPS FAP 2024: ANTICIPATING THE NEW EU LEGISLATIVE PERIOD

The European Union is finding itself in a decisive moment in history. Profound changes in the external context, alongside obvious internal deficiencies, leave no doubt that there are no adequate fallback options. And that there will be no sustainable solutions simply emerging by default. Whilst the EU Member States joined forces in the face of dramatic experiences — the COVID pandemic and the brutal full scale aggression of Russia onto Ukraine — the discussions that go beyond dealing with the respective states of the emergency show growing divisions and fragmentation. The theory that every crisis makes our Union stronger seems no longer to implicitly work. Against this backdrop, there is a need for imagination, for boldness, and for a strong to identify the way forward. It is a time to present a consolidated vision for a stronger, more coherent, and more confident Union. And to that end, this is the period in which social democracy can and should claim the leadership to ensure the primacy of progressive politics for the years to come.

This is the rationale underpinning FAP 2024, which is drafted with a question on how FEPS could serve in that mission, playing an important role within the European progressive family. The document looks at the best ways of consolidating and promoting the work completed so far while showing how FEPS can further concentrate its efforts and resources on a set of carefully chosen priorities. In order to select these, there is a necessity for prudent and pragmatic analyses of which building blocks will be most essential to constructing an ever-stronger, sustainable Union and which will serve as fundamentals in defining the EU's role as an important pole in the future multipolar world order.

### I.A The vision for an ever stronger, sustainable Union

It is possible that the mandate of 2019 -2024 will be described in the chronicles as one of the most turbulent in the EU's history. It has seen the unthinkable – the first ever and painful exit of a Member State; the pandemic that took countless victims and highlighted the importance of the European Social Model and EU solidarity; and finally the advancement of the war at the EU's doorstep. All of these prompted further crises, which amalgamated to the extend of earning the name of a *polycrisis*. The effects put in question the initial and timeless promise to which the integration process was attached, namely that the cooperation of the Member States within the community would lead to prosperity, progress, security, and peace for everyone both inside and in its surroundings. Although the Union persevered and there is a record of the proud achievements resulting from enhanced cooperation in the wake of the subsequent predicaments, the existential questions regarding the future of the EU and the shape it should have, remain largely unanswered.

First of all, the Russian invasion and the war that has been heroically fought by Ukraine for over a year in the name of the right to peace, self-determination, and independence continue to impact the international situation. Worldwide, it has proven the fragility of the existing order and emphasised the need to reform the global governance system. To this day, it is hard to predict when the end of the military conflict could come, what the conditions for peace would be, how the rebuilding would be organised and paid for, and what kind of post-war processes would be put in place to reckon for all the destruction and atrocities. But what is clear is that as the war continues, there are tectonic shifts on the geopolitical map and the EU must be vigilant not to permit itself to be pushed to the secondary league of global powers. The threat is real, and whilst the Union has been outspoken in terms of its adherence to the democratic alliance of the West - which has been restored with the presidency of Joe Biden – this strategic coalition may not possess the necessary majority to set the terms of the next order. It may not be enough to guarantee that it will be multilateralism and not, for example, the possibly enlarged BRICS that will be in control of the global agenda henceforth. In that context, Europe’s ability to speak with a strong, united voice – starting from the occasion of the UN Future Summit - and to jointly define terms of external partnerships is of profound importance. Alongside it’s the capacity to act and foster stronger relations with the currently neighboring regions, such as the Western Balkans. To those debates, FEPS together with its Members can vastly contribute too, as it has been conducting a set of related initiatives, such as: FEPS “Foresight project”, the book edited jointly by FEPS Secretary General and Vice President under the title “Europe and the War in Ukraine. From Russian Aggression to New Eastern Policy”, the new initiative in regards to the Feminist Foreign Policy and the series of the “UNited for... conferences”.

Furthermore, this need for a common global outlook for Europe connects with another aspect of external policies. The EU has come to realise the scale of interdependencies that it is entangled with. In the midst of war, when diverse players have been resorting to the unconventional, strategic use of supply chains, it became abundant that the question of how to approach globalisation in its current form has been neglected for too long. One could say that the last serious, in-depth debate in which that transformative process was in the spotlight and its neoliberal character was being exposed is as much as two decades old. Though there have been some fragmented attempts to re-formulate the approach at the occasion of either the trade agreements negotiations or commitments to fighting climate change agenda or to the Sustainable Development Goals, there has been a lack of determination to forge a consolidated, comprehensive approach. Even promising concepts such as European Strategic Autonomy have become affected by a tendency to water things down and use such concepts less as a doctrine, and more as a sort of *drop-down* menu. That was broadly discussed by FEPS, its Members, and also colleagues from the S&D Group in the framework of i.e. Recovery Watch and the European Strategic Autonomy project. The consequence of neglecting the globalisation

debate, alongside the realisation that neo-liberalism ain't passé, is something that Europe has discovered the hard way. Particularly, since the Union has been struggling in the past months with the issues related to global supply chains and to the eminent energy and the cost-of-living crisis. It was also confronted with the fact that succeeding in ambitious projects such as the *greening of the economy* depends at this moment on the goodwill of external actors (who for example are key providers of the so-called critical raw materials).

Additionally, when discussing the diverse impacts of the war, one has to acknowledge that there was a sense of moral responsibility that the Europeans have felt for the victims and transcended onto different levels. Within local communities, people rushed to offer help and receive the refugees – which may not have changed the European's attitudes of the Europeans to migration in general – but definitely was a very hopeful mobilisation. On the level of the governments, there were diverse changes implemented to the budgets and to the programmes in order to support Ukraine and foresee means for reconstruction in the future. But the longer the war has been lasting, the more realisation there has been that there would need to be not only a new round of reflections regarding the EU – NATO relations, but also that the EU would also need to consider its own peace-building and peacekeeping capacity. This echoed in the decisions of the recent EU Summits that forged the next steps towards a more consolidated Defence Union – which project's future and its economic implications should definitely be further discussed. Especially from the perspective of the centre-left since it was two social democratic Prime Ministers, who had launched the processes of their respective countries' applications to NATO, and since currently the EU external policies and the NATO secretary generalship remain entrusted in the hands of social democratic politicians.

To that end, the war triggered these and many other realisations in regards to EU's international orientation, serving frequently as a catalyst of important processes - many among which have been dormant for years. The Russian aggressive invasion onto a neighboring country prompted not only a discussion about the necessity for the Union to expand, to aim at a new kind of neighborhood and particularly eastern neighborhood policies. The urgency to conceive and update political strategies has become most apparent. Possibly, it has been most accurately depicted by the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz who began speaking about *Zeitenwende*. But opening towards accepting new candidates for accession meant also that there needed to be a return to the paralysed enlargement policies, offering a clear path forward also to the countries from the Western Balkans that have been in a waiting room for at least two decades. In this context, diverse modalities started being pondered. And though there is an agreement, especially amongst the progressives that enlargement has to be an integral part of the new Europe's geopolitical strategy, there is also a concern if the EU really learned the lessons from the last two decades. This makes the Union underline that the EU must be truly prepared for it and

that all the candidates must *prove ready to join*. That is understood as the completion of the negotiations and full adherence to the Copenhagen criteria. To that end, not as an alternative – but as a different coordination tool for broader coordination – the European Political Community (EPC) has been launched. If political and operational questions are answered, the EPC can demonstrate its potential to foster cooperation within a wider geography. FEPS has already acted as a facilitator in this regard – publishing op-ed’s about the EPC and Thessaloniki process, promoting open discussions within the Friends of the Western Balkan network, and devoting the annual Villa Vigoni 2023 conferences to the topic.

The need for a more consolidated international strategy, the prospect of enlargement, and the emergence of such concepts as the EPC, enhance the strong motivation of the social democrats to revive and advance the discussion about the institutional reform of the EU. In calling for that, the social democrats are very consistent – having been among the proponents of the Conference on the Future of Europe and having been exploring scenarios that could be pursued immediately, even within the scope of the existing Treaties. Progressives had been since the beginnings arguing for the reform that would strengthen the legitimacy of the EU, that would involve citizens and that would expand the competencies. Of the latter, the crucial importance could have been seen also for example during the pandemic – where Europeans clearly expected Europe to do more and it has risen to the challenge, despite the fact that so many elements of what is understood as the Social Europe and the Health Union remained outside of the scope of the common policies. To that end, progressives have persistently argued that CoFoE results were impressive, and inspiring, and should not be forsaken. And also that there is more to discuss, looking at what was possible to achieve while installing such tools as Next Generation EU and hereafter conditionality mechanism. Again, this is proof that for too long the dispute has been stuck in between ultimatums about the decision-making processes (especially in regards to the unanimity clauses) and the hesitation of *risking* a reform of the treaties. That is while there have been alternatives to move on, as depicted in the so-called FEPS Blue Book “Our European Future”, in the work of the High-Level Advisory Group under the leadership of the FEPS President, and in the aspects of the work delivered by WG on Transnational Politics.

The institutional reform is key not only from the perspective of the EU governance mechanisms; but even more so when attempting to strive for the defense of the core European values. In the current legislative period, the so-called “Brussels” saw a dispute between the European Parliament (EP) and the European Commission (EC), with the EP suing the EC for negligence in defending democracy and the rule of law. The settlement was reached, but the entire process highlighted that EU must be able to do more and be equipped to withstand pressures that it often finds itself under from the side of the authoritarian regimes that feature among its own member states. Looking at the electoral tendencies,

fragmentation, and radicalisation of the European electorate – it will be key for Europe to be able to intervene to protect democracy and prevent backlash, to stand as an unwavering guardian of human rights, and herewith the rights of women, LGBTQI+ people, of minorities, of migrants, of people of diverse ethnical backgrounds and beliefs.

Providing the European Union with the necessary tools is however only one side of a two-folded strategy. To preserve and promote democracy, one needs to understand how come within less than eight decades since the end of the Second World War people would seriously consider entrusting their faith into the hands of the radical, extremist, and anti-European right-wing parties. This is a question that FEPS and its Members started exploring both within the Next Left Research Programme, as also within the concept of the new initiative that will devote attention to the crisis of the right and radicalisation. From the preliminary assessment, one can say that a part of the answer to why the extreme forces have been growing in popularity is connected with the growing sense of insecurity and disempowerment among the citizens. There was little time for recovery after the crash of 2008, and once the disastrous austerity policies were finally abandoned to give way to growth-oriented strategies, the COVID pandemic hit. Its effects on the socio-economic dimension multiplied the pre-existing challenges, deepening persistent inequalities and causing new imbalances. These gaps continued growing among individuals, among genders, regions, and countries, pushing the EU onto a very uneven developmental trajectory. The badly needed economic and fiscal reforms, which could have been pursued within the post-pandemic recovery and the window of opportunity that opened (looking at the Recovery and Resilience Facility and introduction of such innovations as the European Minimum Wage), had been again put on hold – whilst the European economies had to move into a different modus in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine. But there is a limit to a pause in reform, especially if the ambition is to steer Europe back onto the path of prosperity and progress for all while making sure that the economies can better absorb further potential shocks in the future.

To that end, this above-mentioned mission to ensure progress for all must become the main pledge within which the EU provides the answers to the numerous critical challenges enlisted in here. And that is yet another reason for which it must be the progressives to take the lead – to make sure that the next chapter of the EU integration is the one focused on the implementation of a modern vision of a Social Europe. Such a political project must involve fighting inequalities, wherever they occur - among people, communities and regions. Hence the inclusive, anti-discriminatory and cohesion policies are key. Social Europe must provide a new concept of labour and reform of the world of work, which will include guarantees for old and new rights (such as the right to disconnect and new worktime directive), protect and empower in the new reality (fighting malpractices and abuse of i.e. platform workers, helping restore the idea of democracy at the workplace), define new benchmarks of *better*

*jobs* (including for undervalued sectors such as care and social services workers) and fight unemployment, strive for prosperity and wellbeing (including psychological) at the workplace. Consequently, the EU must pick up the long-overdue debate about public services and goods (revisiting painful decisions that led to liberalisation of the services of the general interest and some social services), pave way with its social model (pioneering solutions for the new organisational model of the digital welfare states) and push for the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This should be where part of answers to the question of demographic challenges and intergenerational solidarity among the Europeans could be forged. This means also, that Europe must regain pace and position of a leader in the so-called twin transition (digital and climate), turning it into the triple-transformation of green, digital and social progress. And to that end, it must unblock many of the dossiers that await *deals* – which inconclusiveness is simply harmful and of that, the unfinished (and disenchanting) Pact for Migration and Asylum remains an example of. On all these issues FEPS with the support of its members have been consecutively working on, having a very rich library of policy briefs and policy studies, publications and tools such as the “EU Care Atlas” and many others, with ready-to-take proposals within them.

These tasks are monumental indeed. But, as indicated earlier – there is no choice but to accept them, providing and pursuing progressive answers. Social democratic family is ready to match this challenge, and FEPS with its past, ongoing, and planned work will certainly be in a position to keep providing adequate supportive contributions.

### **I.B The strategic positioning of social democracy in Europe**

The political map of Europe remains dynamic and complex. As such, it reflects the interplay between diverse processes that perpetually transform the contemporary party systems on the national level, and by extension alter the conditions for both the office and policy-seeking. What was diagnosed several years ago as a crisis of so-called “traditional parties” persists, visible in such symptoms as erosion of the partisanship, subsequent volatility of the voters' base, and fragmentation. It has affected in waves different parties across the member states. And though possibly most attention in literature and commentaries have been paid to the eminent crisis of social democracy – with even special pejorative terminology developed as “pasokification of the left” (which in the light of the last elections in Greece has been re-visited), the equally grave or even currently severer crisis of the center-right should not be let skip the spotlight. On both sides' extremes, new organisations emerged and grew in strength. To that end, it has become almost impossible for a single party in a different than two-party system to hope for a landslide victory.



In overall terms, today's polls ahead of the European elections suggest that the PES family will sustain its position as the second parliamentary group and will end with a similar size (with possible small gain or decline). That is of course just a prediction, which may alter much in the next months – when one hand the electoral campaign is in full swing, and on the other when the crucial national elections in the Member States will have taken place. Naturally, for the EP vote, much will depend on the turnout, which in 2019 was for the first time breakthrough in the tendency of the decline that had been noted ever since 1979. To that end, there is of course another variable which is the question of how the currently ambivalent voters will behave and should they vote, whom would they cast their ballots for. Their decision may be influenced by the anti-European narrative that is growing, especially in some of the member states, as also by all the developments in the past months – when the focus has been on the so-called Qatar gate and corruption among the EU officials.

Although the nature of the European elections evolved and they no longer fit into the category defined once in political sciences as “the vote of the second order”, still they remain atypical and may surprise with the results. That was the case in 2019 when there had been a great fear that social democrats would plunge and the opposite happened, with many associating the success with the so-called “Timmermans effect”. That is also why it is key to look beyond the European numbers, zooming into the national level. There the situation of the PES sister parties remains rather difficult. Although the unexpected victory of SPD in Germany, PS in Portugal, LP in Malta, the breakthrough in Slovenia, the remaining in the power of SD in Denmark and SDE (in coalition), of SDE Estonia and possibly also for POSL in Luxembourg, and the recent return of PASOK definitely contributed to restoring of hope, there is equally much to worry about. In parallel, PvdA, BSP, PS France were noting electoral lows, SAP and SDP did not succeed in remaining in the government, and CSSD found itself outside of the parliament altogether. This, without going into much detail (which are subjects of the respective editions of the FEPS European Progressive Observatory editions and the Next Left Country Case Studies) indicates very mixed tides.

The record may be astonishing, taking into account what had been said in the midst of COVID about the return of the concept of the welfare (and empowering) state and the revival of the values that had been traditionally associated with social democracy (solidarity, social justice, community). One could expect that this would have inspired voters to align behind centre left parties, as so would the anxiety and search for safety in the midst of inflation and the cost of living crisis. But the surveys and studies that FEPS conducted (also in regards to the shift of the opinion polls in the times of COVID) have shown that not only there is no change of the electoral pendulum by default (which lesson is a repetition of the conclusion of what happened during the post-2008 crash elections), but also that the demarcation lines between left and right have moved again. It is no longer the case that the centre-left owns the

competence on the socio-economic issues and the centre-rights approached matters from a cultural standpoint, as also that the matrix of votes between these two is identical as the spread of votes among people with progressive and conservative attitudes. This, among many other elements, indicates that there is a need for a profoundly different way of conceptualizing social democracy – inside of the centre-left spectrum, as a party, and in a lead of the broader movement, as an engine of diverse social and political coalitions. The success and the preservation of the distinctive character will therefore depend on: upholding the consequential ideological integrity; on the ability to make (hard) choices and communicate them well; on the openness to experiment with organizational forms and easiness of adapting to the needs of the members (of which the recent unanticipated dynamic of the leadership contest inside of the SPÖ may turn to be a positive example of).

That said, the mix tides of recent years have not deprived social democracy of the lessons it had earned in the midst of the previous crisis. Among these had been: the importance of balancing the short-term answers with mid and long-term vision; the necessity to remain true to its political DNA and herewith uphold the party's predictable, trustworthy character; and finally the relevance of strong leadership on top of an inclusive, engaging, and empowering party. Implementing these had been behind some of the parties' return to power, the relative revival of the parties' popularity in diverse segments of social strata (including young people), and translated into a noteworthy number of Prime Ministers, Ministers and Stakeholders. Many among them have made an effort to build cross-European relations amongst themselves, and despite existing divergent views – attempted to find a convergence of opinions where it would be possible. This meant that though social democrats had not been in the majority, still they were well connected and did use this advantage to launch several valuable initiatives on the level of the European Council. FEPS tried to contribute to enhancing those ties, among others with its flagship initiatives such as Call to Europe or Progressive Governance Symposium, as also illustrating some of the examples in the latest editions of the Progressive Yearbook.

To that end, at this final year of the current legislative period social democrats can say that though the odds at the beginning in 2019 were not favourable to them (especially in the midsts of the post-electoral top EU jobs negotiations) – at the end they persevered. They managed not only to attain control of the portfolios that had been key to shaping and guiding the EU – but within them forge tangible progress. That all despite the crisis proliferated reality. The record of achievements is vast thanks to the outstanding, visionary, and tireless work across dossiers such as the European Green Deal, Social Rights, Gender Equality, Economic Governance, Enlargement, Reform of the EU electoral law, Working Time Directive, Pay Transparency, Minimum Wage, Digital Union and many others. They stood tall and won several very tough battles, even when other groups had shifted position last moment – of which example is passing the reports on Due Corporate Dilligence or Nature Restoration

Law. These all stand as proof that though social democrats may not be the holders of the majority, they do have an acute ability to lead – pursuing with all the tools given the consequential agenda. This is precisely why, also assessing the numbers and tides in Europe – the objective to *ensure primacy of progressive politics stands* for a realistic goal. And FEPS, its members partners, and networks will certainly be in a position to contribute to attaining it.

In that strive, there are already several important assets at FEPS disposal and these are growing – ranging – to name just a few - from long-term commitments (such as the Next Left Research Programme), going through deliberations on the state and Future of the Union (within the thematic field “Political Union”), through all the publications and networks established inside of the Social Europe and Economic Governance fields (including here, for example, the Senior Progressive Economist Network). In the last 4 years, it has developed efficient communication tools that allow catering better as well to the needs of political counseling (see i.e. Policy Briefs and Policy Studies Series, Thematic Breakfast Meetings) and also promote diverse relevant conversations to the broader audiences (such as is the case of the FEPS Talks Podcast Series). Though evidently FEPS is prohibited from campaigning, it is ready to support all the other processes that will shape the next mandate 2024 – 2029. It is in place to continue providing knowledge, expertise, and resources to support the pivotal role that Sister Organisations (S&D, PES and PES Women, PES in CoR, EESC Presidency) and their representatives will play in that period. To that end, thanks to the Network (of researchers, civil society and trade unions experts, and diverse stakeholders) and the engagement of the Members, FEPS is determined to serve in helping build connections, provide spaces for dialogue and forge mutual understanding among progressives acting on the different levels of governance (from international, through European, national, regional to local). In that mission especially the program “Call to Europe” is noteworthy, being a tool to support social democrats in government and in opposition in the times of their countries' EU Presidencies (with Belgian, Hungarian and Polish coming up next).

### **I.C FEPS well prepared for key debates**

FEPS is a **European political foundation** registered under the number EUPF4BE0896.230.213. It was created to “*serve as a framework for national political foundations, academics, and other relevant actors to work together at the European level*” (art. 1.4 of Regulation (EC) 1524-2007). Consequently, and as enlisted in the FEPS Statutes (adopted with changes at the extraordinary FEPS GA on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021) **its ambition is to undertake intellectual reflection at the service of the progressive movement, in pursuit of strengthening and promoting the founding principles of the European Union.** These are: freedom, equality, solidarity, democracy; respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, and human dignity, and the rule of law. Consequently, the ambition of FEPS is to become the leading institute when it comes to progressive thinking about the future of the EU.

In 2024, **FEPS can already rely on 74 members**: 43 full, 26 observers, and 5 ex-officio ones. There are also several applications that are being currently considered to ensure that the membership covers the entire geographical area of the European Union. Additionally, FEPS engages through research, events, training projects, and publications with an extensive network of partners, among whom are: renowned academics and universities, as also political leaders, trade unions and civil society experts. These credentials have made FEPS recognized as an important stakeholder both in international rankings of the foundations and think tanks (see i.e. the Pennsylvania Global Think Tank Index), as well as in awarding it with the UN ECOSOC consultative member status.

What is more, FEPS has undergone a profound internal transformation – when it comes to internal governance mechanisms, key procedures, and the gradual implementation of diverse strategies (communication, financial, human resources, international relations, and training). Under the leadership of the President, Secretary General, Bureau, and with the advice of its Scientific Council, in its day-to-day management, FEPS can rely on a committed team of professionals. Moreover, it has built a set of important assets, of which prominent examples are: a headquarters that is modern and serves all the needs of a leading think tank; as also virtual platforms that enhance the brand and facilitate external communication.

Building on its potential, vibrant network, and engaged communities, as also benefiting from exceptional positioning and unique assets (as described above), FEPS is drafting this Framework Activity Programme 2024 in order to: showcase the consequence, when it comes to upholding the initiatives in which it is renowned and has established credentials; bring more coherence to its activities and herewith ensure even a stronger input building on cooperation with members; introduce and re-emphasize some cross-cutting issues that will further help FEPS raise its profile and be the pioneer on the fields crucial for social democrats in the new legislative period.

In that spirit, the FAP 2024 will be the third in the history of FEPS to define 3 annual priorities around which all the FEPS work will evolve. Learning from the experience, the ambition remains here to make the priorities even stronger embedded inside of the 10 thematic fields and in exchange to focus thematic fields on contributing to their accomplishment. They are defined to serve as a benchmark against which the project ideas will be cross-checked to stream the Work Plan 2024, to forge more cooperation among the members and hence after enhance the output in the spirit of “less is more”.

## **II | MISSION HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2024: TO BE INSPIRING, INSTRUCTIVE, AND INSTRUMENTAL**

The current state of affairs shows all the indications that it is a defining moment in history. Facing and making what will be undoubtedly tough, strategic choices will have long-term effects. The decisions will set the trajectory for political and socio-economic developments, determining the shape that the Union will take and impacting herewith the chances for new equilibrium on the global level. And although there is a persistent sense of unpredictability regarding the context, it may be overcome with confidence resulting from own's sense of a clear direction and strong political will. To that end, though the future is always unknown and recently the pace of unexpected events has been overwhelming, there is a way of setting the overall course. It is anchored in addressing the challenges that are identified already in a complex, coherent manner and herewith providing a strong reference that may be inspiring, instructive, and instrumental in responding consequently to anything that may occur additionally. With that in mind, FEPS is determined to consolidate and deliver within 3 strategically relevant dimensions that will contribute in strive for:

### **1) For a Resilient, Transformed and Fair Europe**

*Addressing the cost of living crisis, strengthening the resilience against recessions and moving on with the green, digital and social transformation*

### **2) For a Democratic and Enlarged Europe**

*Focusing on stronger democracy and the rule of law, bringing peace and hope to the wider Europe, preparing EU enlargement and internal institutional reform*

### **3) For a Stronger Europe shaping the New Global Order**

*Boosting the global role of the European Union with a focus on peace, climate and SDGs, while upholding multilateralism and ensuring strategic autonomy*

### **II.A For a Resilient, Transformed and Fair Europe**

*Addressing the cost of living crisis, strengthening the resilience against recessions and moving on with the green, digital and social transformation*

Europe's recovery post-2008 and post-austerity periods had been challenged by the impacts of the pandemic. It started as a health crisis but then turned into a full-fledged socio-economic predicament. In parallel, phenomena such as climate change and digitalization were picking up speed and expanding

in terms of their effects. The pace and size meant that any further delay in addressing them head-on would have disastrous consequences. To that end, providing a way out was not a matter of *rebuilding* or even *building back better*. It was an issue of addressing the most pertinent questions of contemporary times in a way that would redefine social progress, define safety nets and set a new benchmark for much-needed modernisation. This was a motivation with which the Next Generation EU has been conceived, as a plan with extraordinary tools and bold measures attached to it. Though the implementation progressed, before the results could have been made tangible – Russia invaded Ukraine. This not only changed dramatically literally everything but also had a further impact, having among the implications the energy and cost-of-living crisis.

In the midst of that all, it couldn't be clearer that EU needs to become more resilient. In terms of economy and finance, it must look at how to adjust further mechanisms of economic governance and fiscal rules. The FEPS Recovery Watch, among others, provides an excellent record of proposals on how to do that – looking also at what kind of policies could in the most effective manner address questions such as: how to eliminate inequalities and imbalances; how to fight inflation, speculation and excessive profits; how to restore the path to prosperity and hence after how to conceive an adequate Industrial Strategy for Europe. The latter must be cohesive and must bring forward the elements that would help to enhance both European cohesion and convergence (that bridge above the deepening geographical, “core versus periphery” and “frugals versus everyone else” divides). Evidently, the more resilient economic model must be built on the premise that the further re-emergence of the neo-liberal dogma must be prevented, and the economy must be seen as transformative, empowering, gender-sensitive, caring, and focused on the well-being of all the people.

Such an approach must be paired with renewed efforts to implement an ambitious vision for Social Europe. There again FEPS has much to offer, having worked already on the important building blocks such as: the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Right, such as European Welfare State concept, the European Health Union (and there also dossiers of Mental Health), on Child Union and on specific initiatives such as Zero Unemployment Areas. What requires further attention is the new Social Pillar Action Plan (especially after the Porto Social Summit), the social protection (for times of transition and as a shield in the period of costs upsurge). An important element that FEPS also intends to devote resources to is the question that in political terms has been dormant and effectively starts being pressing again – namely consequences of demographic changes and a need for policies that recommit Europe to the pledge of striving for intergenerational justice.

In that sense, the aspects that are involved in the Social Europe dimension connect with the challenges coming from so-called twin transition – climate and digital. There, FEPS has a very strong drive to see

these two as a part of “triple transformation”, of which the notion with the addition of the concept of social justice as a compass was more broadly described above. When it comes to climate and environment, FEPS has been proud to be among pioneers and those who have been arguing for an approach – which in doctrinal terms Paul Magnette recently labelled as “eco-socialism”. In that sense, even long before the energy crisis emerged – FEPS had been working on mainstreaming climate issues (especially into work, health, gender, digital and migration policies) and arguing for progress in the effective implementation of both the Green Deal and the Energy Union. It plans to follow closely these, alongside the agenda connected with RePower EU and “Fit For 55”. Consequently, what will be of great relevance in the upcoming months and years will be the issue of keeping “just transition” as a compass for all the current and new policies (on both inner-EU and global levels); the attention to transformation within the labour market and creation of the new green jobs, especially as envisaged in the plans for the Green Deal Industrial Plan. With the war continuing, Europe must lead by example not allowing any wavering from its commitments to fight climate change, and that will also include important revisions in policies focused: on rewilding and supporting biodiversity, in energy transition strategy, and in food and agriculture. To that end, FEPS has and will remain committed to providing tools to strengthen the progressive narrative regarding these issues, as also will look at ways of effectively combatting the “greenwashing”.

Finally, as much as in the case of climate policies Europe has been able to rise to the contemporary challenges when it comes to digitalisation – the Union has been lagging behind. That is even when important progress has been made in the legislative dimension, with S&D MEPs leading on the dossiers regarding ways to shape the “digital economy and society” in the spirit of social justice. Within its digital programme and projects, FEPS efforts have been heavily concentrated on artificial intelligence, the use of algorithms at the workplace, platform work and workers, as also the question of dark stores and disruptive models. The issues that will be in the focus in 2024 and beyond will add to that list the relevant questions of how to organise digital (welfare) state, how to safeguard democracy and get control of “surveillance capitalism”, as also how to build EU strategic capacity in the digital dimension (so that the Union can stand resilient against digital global giant malpractices, as also defend itself and its citizens in the face of dangers such as cyber warfare and crimes).

## **II.B For a Democratic and Enlarged Europe**

***Focusing on stronger democracy, bringing peace and hope to the wider Europe, preparing EU enlargement and internal institutional reform***

The contemporary times – as turbulent as they are – characterise with the growing sense among the citizens that the diverse developments contribute to their subsequent disempowerment. This fuels

anxiety, and resentment and leads frequently to revolt. The latter would have taken in the recent years shape of either social mobilisations or electoral abstentions, but currently, more frequently it translates into radicalisation among electorates. The result of that is re-emergence of the extremist, right-wing populist forces – which noted grand gains in the recent elections in Sweden and Italy (to name just two of the latest examples). The policies, the narrative, and the actions by the empowered leaders of those parties are largely corrosive to the already weakened democracies and hence the mission to fight for safeguarding and promoting democracy is among the top priorities for the next legislative term.

The tasks start at the level of the Union, which has made progress with the introduction of the conditionality mechanism and slow, but still important actions taken in the attempt to activate Article 7 procedures in regard to the states that breached the democratic values and attacked the rule of law. Next to preventive actions, evidently also the experience of the Conference on the Future of Europe has been particularly inspiring – showcasing the existing potential for qualitative improvements of both representative, deliberative and participatory dimensions of democracy. More needs to be done, and FEPS stands ready for several aspects of the debate – starting from the work it assembled on the concept of the Future of Europe (with the so-called Blue Book and the High-Level Advisory Group), the work on the Transnational Parties, as also the projects that allow to zoom in onto the specific issues (such as the ones devoted to the situation in Hungary, in Poland and in the post-Brexit UK). The plans for the upcoming months involve continuation that will focus on evaluating the results of the European elections (especially in the context of their meaning for the future of European democracy), investing energy in exploring paths that could lead to developing a true ‘Citizens Europe’, discussion that would enable diverse actors to perhaps converge around some of the issues that look at the institutional reforms, full use of existing articles and the future treaty reforms. Moreover, efforts will be made to help bridge the inner debate with the external ones – bringing the question of democracy criteria into the deliberations regarding the European Political Union and in the context of the enlargement policies.

Furthermore, with the defending and deepening democracy thematic field, FEPS has been gaining credentials as a hub where specific issues – such as young people’s participation in politics” have been analysed in detail. This expertise is fundamental and will be further used as an anchoring point also for the new projects that are currently being designed. Among them a very prominent one is the initiative to explore the origins of regained popularity of the right-wing extremist parties in diverse national contexts, and what follows what kind of electoral base they mobilise, and in how far their emergence affects the character of the contemporary centre right. This will offer a few new openings that will see an attempt of a foresight (inside of the pollsters’ network and within the new cycle of the Progressive



Governance Symposium); an evaluation of the roots of present anti-Europeanism (starting from the Next Left lecture on the topic in the EP in fall 2023), and the discussion about safeguarding conditions for free media.

To that end, FEPS intends to make this second annual priority focused on democracy go beyond the usual institutional understanding. For social democrats, democracy has always been a transversal principle – that should apply to the economy, public services, and workplace. A great example of where its empowering dimension of the notion of democracy is tangibly visible is the issue of Gender Equality. There, FEPS has become a recognized stakeholder, having been working on the new Gender Contract, on the European Care Strategy, on the Care Atlas, on Health and Reproductive Rights. It has joined also very strongly the fight to eliminate gender-based violence (of which commitment publications, podcasts, surveys and training are proud examples of). The next legislative period will offer a chance to strive for further progress in all these dossiers, provided that the conservative backlash will be prevented. To that end, FEPS is determined to continue its work – adding to the portfolio also new intersectional questions, being LGBTQI+ people’s rights in the EU and striving against technology-led discrimination.

## **II.C For a Stronger Europe shaping the New Global Order**

### ***Boosting the global role of the European Union with a focus on peace, climate and SDGs, while upholding multilateralism and ensuring strategic autonomy***

Within the changing global context and with the brutal war at the doorstep being a reality, Europe has a moral obligation to stand tall reaffirming its commitment to peace and to strive for a new, multipolar world order. Of course, it is being suggested that Europe as a part of the West finds itself more and more in the minority position, with declining influence and facing an option to fall into the second league of global players. This is a daunting scenario, which however can be counteracted with the power that the EU can mobilise if it acts united and aspire to use the strength that it as a Community based on values it can master. There are enough tools within its policies toolbox (including partnerships and trade agreements), which can prove effective if only put in use (of which the outcomes of the recent EU-CELAC Summit was a reminder). These instruments can be further reinforced if the concepts such as the European Strategic Autonomy are pursued and fully implemented. As the EU’s responsibility for the course of global development has both moral and geostrategic dimensions, for which reason it must never give up on its already existing commitments it has within the UN system and it must continue pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda, the Beijing Women Rights Agenda, the COP pledges and many others.

To that end, FEPS has been seconding the progressive stakeholders in charge of the EU external relations, providing several initiatives and frameworks within which these questions could be explored and discussed. To begin with, the FEPS Review Meeting in the presence of the High Representative Josep Borrell resulted in the new direction given to the projects focused on “foresight and long-term implication of the War”, the deliberations on Ukraine’s reconstruction and path towards the EU. In parallel, FEPS has been also using its UN ECOSOC Consultative Status, intervening in the CSW, and COP and organizing the series of the “United for...” conferences at the fringe of the UN GA – both of which have contributed to strengthening the European progressive voice at these gatherings. In addition, with the election of President Biden and EU’s return to *transatlanticism*, also at FEPS there have been enhanced efforts paid to projects reinforcing the EU – US relations (including the “State of the Unions” annual event),, alongside the EU – Latin America (EU-Brasil, EU-Mexico, EU-Chile) and EU – African Union relations. These will be continued with the attention to the EU global priorities agenda, and will further see also complementary aspects that are to focus on global trade and supply chains on one hand, and on the other the EU (Defence Union) – NATO partnership.

But, the strive for a new global order means that the EU must also return to several questions that it allowed to stay frozen for a time. In that context, Ukraine’s application for EU membership was an important impulse to reopen the EU enlargement debate and consider the modalities for greater Europe, European Political Community (EPC) and renewed European Eastern Partnership. Against this backdrop, FEPS has a proud record of projects that right ways may contribute to advancing the conversation – having together with members founded the Friends of Western Balkans initiative, having invested in the Balkan Focus and having been actively supporting sister parties in countries like Albania and Northern Macedonia by involving them in the specially crafted Next Left projects. These efforts will continue, while seeing a greater convergence of these initiatives with also so-called Korcula School and in relation to cooperation within the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity. All the efforts will be supported also by the activities deriving from i.e. implementation of the the FEPS Training Strategy and its Open Progressive University offer further bridges and openings.

Finally, it goes without any doubt in the next legislative period there can be no further delay in facing the challenge of consolidating the EU migration and asylum policies. Especially now, in the wake of the stagflation and consequent anxieties people have regarding their socio-economic prospects, the disinformation campaigns and the hatred speech of the populist right-wing radicals are regrettably finding fertile ground. Progressives must prevent them. While the centre left strategies to address the issues of immigration policies have been complete and/or successful, there is much reflection going on and this calls for the reminder that a way forward must be underpinned by the core, indispensable

social democratic values. This is also why the project regarding social democratic ideology and the challenge of migration within the Next Left, alongside with all the work that will be geared by the Progressive Migration Group remains pivotal. To that end, while it is fairly possible that the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum will remain an unfulfilled promise of the current legislative period, it is a strong reminder that more needs to be done to reach an agreement and develop a European migration policy that prevents migrants' discrimination, exclusion and deaths.

### **II.D FEPS desired impact for the 3 priorities**

The 3 overarching priorities are designed to guide the FEPS work across the 10 thematic fields, as also accelerate the efforts when it comes to the publications, communication, training and policy consultancy in the support of the progressive stakeholders. On the EU level this refers to the incumbent and new S&D Group and the Members of the European Parliament, EU Commissioners, President and Members of the Committee of the Regions and of European Economic and Social Council, as also PES, PES Women, Rainbow Rose, YES, ESO, Socialist International, Global Progressive Forum and Progressive Alliance. On the national and local level, it would refer to the progressives both in leading positions (MPs, Ministers, party leaders, local and regional representatives), as also progressive movement members across the board.

The ambition of FEPS remains to launch important debates around those 3 priorities; connect relevant politicians, experts, academics, trade unionists, civil society stakeholders and members of the public; and through a dialogue contribute to building mutual understanding across the EU Member States and beyond the EU, among the sister and partner organisations, among communities and citizens.

## **III | CORE THEMES AND FUNCTIONS: POLICY FIELDS WITH LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS**

### **III. A Long-term thematic commitments**

Building on the strong credentials that underpin FEPS position as a European progressive think tank, FEPS intends to focus on the 3 priorities (as articulated above), while upholding its work within **10 thematic fields**. Their re-adjusted orientations for 2024 are:

1. **SOCIAL EUROPE** – monitoring the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the related Action Plan, deepening the debate on public health, decent work and social protection, and supporting the fight against poverty and inequalities
2. **ECONOMY AND FINANCE** – designing a resilient and sustainable economic development model, with a goal to forge policy proposals towards a job-rich recovery, fair transitions and more investment-friendly European fiscal and governance rules
3. **CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT** – addressing the climate emergency and supporting implementation of the European Green Deal, with a commitment to search for further equitable ways to attain ambitious climate targets, create green new jobs and a better mainstream of climate objectives
4. **DIGITAL ECONOMY AND SOCIETY** – assessing the nature and effects of accelerated digitalisation of European societies and economies with an aim of exploring how Europe can pick up autonomous, progressive path towards technological development that serves broader social and economic goals, including here the digitalisation of education, media,
5. **GENDER EQUALITY** – strengthening the commitment to the feminist and gender equality agenda, with a focus on preventing backlash, delivering substantive equality through transformative and gender mainstreamed policies
6. **POLITICAL EUROPE** – examining the functioning of and potential for the reforms within the institutional architecture of the European Union, with a mission to inspire the transition to a new model of integration that will allow for further deepening and enlargement
7. **DEFENDING AND DEEPENING DEMOCRACY** – analysing the main threats to democracy (nationalism, right-wing extremism and authoritarian tendencies) inside but also outside the European Union – in order to find ways to foster participatory and representative democracy

8. **MIGRATION** – informing and sustaining the debate on asylum and migration, with a special focus on defining the features of efficient and humane management of migration and on developing fair and balanced relations with the countries of origin and transit; whilst analysing the nexus between demographic changes in Europe and migration dynamics
9. **EUROPE IN THE WORLD** – focusing on the EU’s role in striving for peace and development in a new multipolar global order, nurturing transatlantic relations but also stronger ties with the Global south, with a focus on foresight capabilities, European Strategic Autonomy, and EU’s commitment to the reconstruction and rebuilding of Ukraine
10. **FUTURE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY** – evaluating the positioning of the progressive forces, with a focus on their programmatic and strategic dilemmas, organisational difficulties and electoral appeal, governing capacities and abilities to remain constructive opposition.

### **III. B FEPS training**

In January 2022 FEPS Bureau endorsed the FEPS Training Strategy, which is in the process of implementation. It evolves around 3 pillars, focused on: knowledge, skills and capacity building respectively. In terms of activities, the Strategy features: among others, FEPS-led flagship activities, variety of instruments inside a consolidated toolbox and the training programmes implemented in cooperation with the FEPS Member Foundations (based on submissions in the context of the semi-annual calls for projects). Among FEPS-led initiatives are, for example:

#### **FEPS Open Progressive University**

FEPS Open Progressive University (OPU) is a new initiative, which aims at providing progressive audiences with access to knowledge about the progressive movement’s principles, history, and ideas for the future. OPU is powered via an online platform (LMS) and is being designed with the goal of building 3 thematic modules per year. The pilot phase was inaugurated on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023 with a lecture by Paul Magnette, PS President and Professor. Then the class of 46 students began exploring topics related to the 3 first modules: Next Left, Resilience and Sustainability, Gender Equality. The efforts will continue in 2024, and will see also the development of a toolbox and further investments in FEPS Primers (two booklets per year). To that end, in cooperation with S&D Group OPU will also develop a special programme for students about and from Ukraine.

#### **FEPS Annual Autumn Academy | Brussels, Belgium | September / October 2024**

Following the successful launch of this initiative in 2019 and a very encouraging feedback from the Members (as shared in the evaluation right after and in the context of the survey on the new FEPS

Training Strategy), as also a pioneering online edition in 2020 and the inventive hybrid version in 2021, FEPS is planning to keep the FEPS Annual Autumn Academy (AAA) as a flagship initiative of the consolidated FEPS Training Strategy. Thus it is looking forward to 6<sup>th</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> post-election) edition in 2024. FEPS is planning to ensure that whilst the design of the programme will evolve, in principle it will always include a set of well-established and effective methods. In the schedule that means including: lecture by prominent personalities, direct exchanges with European leaders (Special Guests), discussions on priority topics with the European stakeholders, as also meeting with potential progressive allies and partners, such as the Party of European Socialists and PES Women, the S&D Group in the European Parliament, PES Group at the Committee of Regions, Young European Socialists, and Rainbow Rose, among others. The AAA will continue providing thematic and country case studies focused workshops, introduction to best practices of advocacy and public communication, as also spaces for political creativity. It will continue also hosting the launch of the FEPS Primers.

### **Ones to Watch | Throughout the year**

FEPS “Ones to Watch” programme is an initiative that was launched in 2015 as an alternative, innovative approach to the challenges faced particularly within the region of Central and Eastern Europe. It is understood as the group of 11 countries that joined the EU in 2004, 2007 and 2013. The projects gather representatives from these member states in a number of three per country, all of whom are between 35-45 years of age and are already elected politicians. The current second cycle is to finish in 2023, seeing a closing event for the current group of members, a recruitment process and an inaugural session for the new cycle in 2024. The planning henceforth will also take into consideration and will remain closely inter-related with the new FEPS Strategy for V4.

### **Young Academics Network ‘FEPS YAN’ | Throughout the year**

This European-wide network, which FEPS established in 2010 with the support of Karl Renner Institut, has been involved with seven cycles and over 500 young researchers (pre-PhD and post-doctoral scholars) from across Europe. The network (consisting of 30—35 participants from a great variety of national and scholarly backgrounds) meets several times a year, and depending on their respective expertise, their representatives become also involved in other FEPS initiatives and activities. At the moment of drafting FAP 2024, FEPS is in the last stage of 8<sup>th</sup> cycle, which will be wrapped in time for the outcomes to provide food for thought ahead of the campaign for the European Elections. The process of recruitment for 9<sup>th</sup> cycle will kick off in winter 2024.

### **FEPS and partners European Political Academies | Throughout the year**

Following the adoption of the Training Strategy, FEPS opened to partnerships with Member Foundations to deliver trainings focused on building capacity and connecting the national and

European themes. The blueprint has been the FEPS – Renner Institut Europapolitische Akademie, which successful model has served as inspiration for several sister editions with partners in Poland, Hungary, and Italy. The effort is to continue with assessment on how to ensure quality, efficiency, and financial sustainability in the future.

### **FEPS and Partners Pool of Trainers | Throughout the year**

One of the new elements of the FEPS Training will be the establishment of the Pool of Trainers. It will be created in a strong partnership with the Member Foundations and will be put at service, providing inspiration and experts ready to offer instructive sessions, as also help synthesise and consolidate Toolbox manuals of civic education and informal learning.

### **III.C FEPS consultancy**

FEPS is proud to have developed a capacity to offer timely and high-quality policy consultancy to progressive policy makers in office or opposition at various stages of the policy process. Current and past research projects, and contributions of the extensive expert network provide a solid basis for FEPS to be in a position from which it can deliver sound policy advice. The key activities that help gearing it are the following ones:

### **FEPS Review Meetings | Brussels, Belgium | Throughout the year**

Following the FEPS General Assembly in June 2017, as well as the decisions taken at the subsequent meetings of the FEPS Bureau, FEPS has been organising the “Review Meetings”. They serve a triple objective: assessment of what has been achieved already within the respective thematic programmes of FEPS; developing the interactions between key stakeholders from the world of politics and academia; enabling identifying new potential priorities to be developed by the Progressive family and FEPS. In that framework, FEPS would like to explore more formalised ways to address the Progressive Commissioners, their respective sherpas; leadership of the PES, S&D Group, CoR and the top advisors in those respective institutions as well. The optimum frequency of Review Meetings is 2 or 3 per year, in order to allow all key issues among the long-term thematic commitments covered at least once in a five-year cycle.

## IV. | FEPS ANNUAL ACTIVITIES AND FLAGSHIP PROGRAMMES

FEPS annual activities and flagship programmes are **diverse projects that have been developed (some of them even in the course of over a decade)** and by now they are both the recognisable trademarks and the awaited momentums within the yearly planning of the Foundation. They are assets and constitute one of the core strengths of the organisation.

At this stage of the planning already FEPS knows that these Annual and Reference Point Activities will take place and is assured of the commitment of the partners to join in these endeavours, even if their respective specificities are subject to further discussion and will further remain relative to the various poignant political situations.

### IV.A Key Annual Public Events 2024

FEPS plays a leading role in creating and maintaining a quality debate in the public sphere, especially when it comes to European politics and policy; as also the development of the European Union and its capacities. The large network of FEPS experts continues boosting, as also gaining recognition – while benefiting from growing number of invitations to contribute to external events. At the same time, FEPS itself is committed to organising several trademark activities, some of which date back to many years before and enjoy with good reputation among the progressive constituencies and beyond.

FEPS is envisaging the following Key Annual and Reference Point Activities to be taking place:

#### **Call to Europe | EU | spring and autumn 2024**

The *Call to Europe* conference ([www.calltoeurope.eu](http://www.calltoeurope.eu)) has become FEPS successful annual signature event. At its origin it was designed to be the public event held in Brussels, but through the reflection the concept was developed and the ambition remains to use the brand for organising the high-level conferences not only in Brussels, but also in the countries holding the Presidency of the EU. A great example of a successful practice was an gathering held in Ljubljana, Slovenia in December 2021. In 2024, FEPS is hoping hold the events of this series in Belgium and Hungary respectively.

The thematic field Call to Europe is connected with is: Political Europe.

#### **FEPS Annual Sir Anthony Barnes Atkinson Lecture | 2024 | Brussels, Belgium**

In 2019 FEPS has been privileged to be entrusted by the family of late Sir Anthony Barnes Atkinson to use the name of this great academic intellectual and pioneer of research when it comes to inequalities



for its new initiative – an Annual Lecture. The inauguration event has been postponed due to COVID, however the first edition is planned to be organised in 2024 and to be followed in the years to come. The thematic field The Atkinson Lecture is connected with is: Social Europe.

### **Progressive Governance Conference | 2024**

The conference builds on two decades of tradition launched in 1999 by a consortium of the political think tanks and foundations, who jointly put forward an initiative that saw most prominent events with the world leaders taking place in (among the others) Santiago de Chile, London, Copenhagen, Madrid, Dublin, Hammanskraal in South Africa and Toronto. It has been a stage for most exhilarating debates. Nowadays, the founders of the initiative belong to the Network of FEPS and through consolidation, it has been an initiative powered by FEPS, Das Progressive Zentrum, Progressive Britain, Center for American Progress and others. With the sequence of two seminars and a conference, in 2024 PGS series will feature a seminar and a final conference. The theme to which the events will be devoted will be: future of social democracy and future of Europe (after the European Elections 2024). The thematic field Progressive Governance Symposium is connected with is: Political Europe / Deepening and Defending Democracy / Next Left.

### **UNITED FOR: Annual international conference organised on the fringe of the UN General Assembly | New York | 2024**

Following the agreements and the personal commitment of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres made to the FEPS delegation during the meeting on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2017, FEPS launched a new initiative entitled “UNited for”. It comprises of an annual international conference, which starting from September 2018 was in New York on the fringe of the UN General Assembly. The intention is to continue, making the most effective use of the FEPS ECOSOC consultative status. And the “Future Summit” announced for 2024 will definitely be a great opportunity for FEPS to present its many contributions deriving, among the others, from the research of foresight projects that are being conducted already.

The thematic field UNITED FOR is connected with is: Europe in the World.

### **10<sup>th</sup> Oxford Symposium | Oxford, UK | July 2024**

The Oxford Symposium was launched as a unique project, which gathers for 2 days programme leading politicians and senior academics from across the EU and the UK, to jointly deliberate on the most pertinent questions regarding the future of social democracy. Each of the editions has been devoted to another focus and resulted in a publication. The partners behind are FEPS together with Progressive Britain and Renner Institut. And needless to say there is a great anticipation on this 10<sup>th</sup> jubilee edition to come.

The thematic field to which Oxford Symposium is connected with is: Future of Social Democracy and its flagship programme “Next Left”.

#### **IV.B FEPS immersion programmes**

In 2020-2022, FEPS has tested a Traineeship Programme and a Visiting Fellowship Programme. They have now become a stabilised features and will continue in 2024, offering FEPS a capacity to boost its acting capacity and providing opportunities for young progressives to get directly involved.

##### **FEPS Visiting Fellowship Programme | Throughout the year**

FEPS is committed to reinforcing its linkages with academia in order to provide valuable policy research and analysis that can instruct and inspire progressive policy-making. To this end, in 2021 FEPS launched a new Visiting Fellowship Programme to give the opportunity to PhD candidates and Post-Docs, and established researchers to contribute to the strategic priorities outlined in the present Framework Activity Programme and bring in fresh thinking and frontier methods in crucial policy areas. The Visiting Fellows work on a research plan that fits with FEPS priorities and projects and will be carried out under the supervision of the Secretary General, in collaboration with relevant FEPS Director and Policy Analysts.

##### **FEPS Trainees Programme | Throughout the year**

In an attempt to provide learning opportunities, and to develop in-house research assistance and logistic support capacity, FEPS has opened a traineeship programme that enables young progressives from across the EU to join the FEPS team with a clear educational objective. The learning content of the programme is well-defined in advance (before the chosen trainee starts his or her tenure). With a semi-annual regularity, FEPS intends to make this programme’s design a proud example of how longer-term political trainings can be organised with an absolute respect to equal treatment and highest labour standards as principles.

## **V. | FEPS COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND PRODUCTS**

Over the past year, FEPS has continued implementing the Communication Strategy, which was adopted by the General Assembly in June 2020. It represents a valid compass for all the activities when it comes to enhancing visual identity and stronger branding, introducing of innovative and engaging communication tools, as also expanding the outreach and impact. While building on the accomplishments of recent years, the core objective for 2024 is consolidation. To that end, the FEPS Communications unit has been repeatedly reinforced to ensure quality support to FEPS core activities and boost the visibility of the foundation.

### **V.A FEPS Communication Strategy**

#### **Strategising and planning**

Ambitious strategising and consistent planning on communications serves ensuring robust performance. Communication is now an integral part of FEPS' work, and there is an organic link between what is being researched, debated and organised on one hand, and what is being disseminated and communicated about on the other. In that spirit, FEPS Communication Team will be working on increasing:

- a) Predictability and synergies – which are key to the efficiency, as well as to increasing the lifespan and cross-promotion opportunities of FEPS materials to the maximum.
- b) Long, mid and short-term comms plans with clear priorities – which are essential to being more strategic, well prepared and have more organised approach to collecting necessary information about upcoming events and activities.
- c) A holistic approach to FEPS's work – which calls for the communications dimension to be included at an early stage of the project's development.
- d) Ability to respond to unforeseeable relevant developments – which is key for a political foundation, especially in the year of the European elections. Together with the constant attention that the communication team has on current affairs, quick reactions and prompt communication will be further facilitated by the well-oiled collaboration and participation of the entire team.

#### **(Online) events coverage & audiovisual capacity**

Events continue to be an essential tool to promote the outputs of the projects, introduce new conversations, and connect diverse audiences.

Since the pandemic, FEPS multimedia capacities have profoundly improved, with a great effort and resources (time, working hours, finances) invested in creating a wide range of highly professional user-friendly interfaces, for always more engaging audio-visual material. The new website is among the innovations and offers yet another set of great opportunities.

To that end, all the public events are recorded by default, allowing FEPS to expand both their ex-post communication and their audience by making the content available in different formats for different platforms, to those who could not attend. An attractive, well-organized, and engaged audiovisual archive is now available as well.

That said, a systematic approach to event coverage is now well-established. The capacity of FEPS to produce audiovisual material has also been reinforced from an HR perspective. In 2024 the facilities and the opportunities that the FEPS HQ provides will be further explored, and new professional settings will be put in place in order to cater to the specific communication needs of the respective events.

### **Visual identity**

FEPS produces high-quality content that deserves an appropriate and aesthetic appearance. After an in-depth review and visual revamp, a new graphic charter and specific layouts were established. Now FEPS can count on standardised formats for all the different publications and the different communications products. FEPS' branding in our headquarters for physical and online events is now much more present. To reinforce the FEPS brand and make it attractive and clearly recognisable in the eyes of its target audiences, innovation to update FEPS' visual identity has never stopped and will continue in 2024

### **FEPS New Website**

The new FEPS website inaugurated in 2022 has been designed in order to be not only FEPS modern cyber business card, but also its virtual headquarters. As such, a viewer entering can explore diverse spaces in which recent projects, events, publications and also relevant information about the FEPS network can be found. It is intuitive and interactive, providing the viewer a great and stimulating experience, and allowing her or him to connect with FEPS authors and ideas. The website is a tool to inform, but also to provide knowledge, and create a community. It is expected to satisfy the highest standards of aesthetics, user-friendliness as well as professional content.

That said, the work in the “back office” still continues and will be further delivered in 2024, focusing on the potential for innovations and improvements. There will be the completion of the migration of the FEPS-owned secondary websites (such as Progressive Post and United For). To that end, as the website provides opportunities for members' visibility, efforts will be invested to make these and the expert pages more robust.

With that all, FEPS Comms Team will continue monitoring the impact through data analyses and try to make the best use of it in seeking further improvements.

### **FEPS on Social Media**

In recent years FEPS has widened its outreach via social media, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Youtube as well as Instagram. With various materials produced by FEPS projects or ahead of FEPS events, we ensure that specific content is catered to specific audiences by choosing and using the appropriate social media channel. Respective FEPS programs may have their own social media channels while ensuring the visibility and consistent messaging of the foundation as a whole.

With the purpose of assessing the state of FEPS' different social networks, in 2023, FEPS' Communication Team carried out a thorough analysis of FEPS' social networks' data. Key highlights from the past year include a significant growth in the number of followers across all FEPS social networks. Compared to our direct "competitors" our results are satisfying, especially if we take into account that some of them may not even be present all the media platforms. The monitoring and analysis will continue in 2024.

### **FEPS Podcast – FEPS Talks**

In 2023 FEPS reached a jubilee episode of the FEPS Talks, which series of podcast features bi-weekly exchanges between invited guests and FEPS Secretary General and FEPS Directors and Policy Analysts. We endeavor in timeliness of the podcast episodes but also a fair representation of the thematic commitments of FEPS, as well as a regional and gender balance of interviewed personalities. The possibility of a qualitative upgrade, better promotion and partnerships will be explored.

### **Media partnerships & external promotion**

Another novelty that followed the adoption of the Communication Strategy is the reinforcement of the external promotion of FEPS' projects through the establishment of commercial partnerships with EU-affairs influential media such as Social Europe, Euractiv, and Politico. These partnerships are to be continued and reinforced in 2024.

As stated in the Communication Strategy, establishing and maintaining a strong network of journalists

is long-term and permanent work. Cooperation with member foundations will be reinforced to disseminate FEPS' intellectual work beyond the traditional EU-bubble audience.

### **Network: member foundations and the progressive family**

The FEPS member foundations and the other members of the overall progressive family are key natural allies. Therefore, the work to reinforce cooperation in the communication and media fields will continue.

In order to overcome the challenge of the very different capacities of FEPS member foundations, next year, FEPS will continue the mapping exercise to identify our counterparts and potential synergies launched in 2023. As already mentioned, members' web pages on FEPS' website will continue to be improved.

In the spirit of strengthening the cooperation within the Progressive family, this year, we have relaunched a series of regular meetings with other communication offices of the Progressive family. This regular collaboration allows us to exponentially grow the impact of the work of each office and exchange best practices. Upcoming EU elections will serve as an opportunity for reinforcing these synergies and cooperation.

### **V.B FEPS publications**

FEPS is proud to have consolidated a sound list of annual and cyclical publications, which by now are also considered to be strong FEPS brands and frequently see their new editions received by the readership with great eagerness. There have been new accomplishments in 2023, on which FEPS intends to build – such as the fact for the first time ever FEPS book resulted from a project was published by external, renowned publisher house (Palgrave). To that end, the past months have also seen the drafting of “FEPS Books strategy”, which will be further discussed and become a useful tool to systematise the production and dissemination parts of the editorial processes, and do all this in an economical way.

### **FEPS Newsletters**

The approach to the FEPS Newsletters has been profoundly altered in 2022/3. Standardisation and predictability are the norm by now. FEPS and the Progressive Post Newsletters – informing about new publications, articles, forthcoming and past events, and other activities and news – are now generally disseminated on fixed days of the week and are planned weeks and months in advance.

In 2023, FEPS began with the “**thematic newsletters**”, meaning that the newsletters are published with a clear weekly focus anytime that the planning allows it. Several aesthetic improvements have

already been included with the **new layout**. Newsletter subscribers keep on growing in number. Segmentation – the practice of dividing a mailing list into smaller segments based on subscribers' interests or activities – is still to be explored, following the upcoming improvement of FEPS's database

### **Progressive Post**

FEPS Progressive Post is a quarterly magazine, which appears in print and online. It features articles connecting with the relevant debates (explaining the polarized opinion on a given topic) and dossiers (including in-depth and multifaceted analyses of a theme), as also interviews, a library (which contains book reviews completed from a critical progressive perspective), and editorials. The magazine's objective is to offer fresh, compelling, and inspiring reflections; recommend valuable ideas and books for consideration; and equip readers with an understanding of very diverse perspectives. Next to the printed and digital version in the English language (which is presented on the dedicated website), FEPS PP now enjoys several partnerships – thanks to which some of its material is translated and republished in EU Member States (for example in Czech, French, Hungarian, Italian, Spanish and more).

### **Progressive Post Newsletter**

The Progressive Post continues to issue a weekly newsletter, which alternatively popularises: Progressive Pages (sharp analysis of the main political developments in Europe and beyond by the FEPS President and Secretary General and by a growing number of prestigious guest authors from both the political and academic worlds); Dossiers (collections of three articles aimed at offering readers in-depth progressive evaluations of European and international topics), Debates (two articles, which present polarised view on the same topic) and Library (book reviews of recent texts, commenting on which is relevant for progressive thinkers, activists and other stakeholders).

### **European Progressive Observatory**

In 2019, the EPO was profoundly remodeled, with its calendar and format revised. Since that point it continues providing the analyses of the campaigns and the outcomes of the parliamentary (or other highly important) elections within the European Union (and in exceptional cases also outside of it), alongside with specific commentaries about the positioning of the progressive parties and their prospects in the electoral aftermath. The ideal EPO newsletter carries three articles. In 2023 the sample of EPO analyses was also included in the FEPS Progressive Yearbook, creating a great synergy and allowing to reuse the rich material by putting it also in a different context and format.

### **Progressive Yearbook**

In January 2023, FEPS published the fourth edition of its “Progressive Yearbook” (PYB), which is gradually becoming a point of reference for European progressives who wish to have an instrument to interpret events and development of the past year and detect the elements that will characterise the new one. For this reason, the PYB will be once again structured in a part looking at the past year, other providing predictions for the future, a couple of case studies (on countries whose recent developments deserve a closer look) and the interview to the Progressive person of the year.

### **FEPS Primers Series**

Within its’ Training Strategy, FEPS introduced a new series of books, which are meant to provide knowledge about European policies. They are designed to be short volumes (120 – 150 pages) and all abide by the same structure, offering readers main facts, figures, references and also explanation about progressive standpoint on the respective matters. FEPS edits two primers per year, having by now made available and having in development books on: EU institutions, EU and gender equality, EU and trade policies, EU and climate change, EU and Digitalisation, and Social Europe. In 2024, there is an expectation to add two more of those volumes to the collection that jointly can be considered also an important toolkit in rising the awareness and hence quality of the debate about the European affairs.

### **FEPS Book Series**

The year 2022 brought about a massive increase in the number of books published by FEPS. Based on tenders carried out in 2021, FEPS started to work with the London Publishing Partnership and Dietz Verlag alongside ASPRA, an older partner. The objective of the new framework is to ensure that FEPS projects can culminate in high-quality products, our programs are served with reliable inputs, and beyond serving the internal needs all printed books (with the exception of the Progressive Yearbook) are available on the market. Market integration contributes to quality control as well. From 2023 book publications will be framed into a consistent strategy with the aim to optimise production and enhance relevance, in line with the interest of political stakeholders, key FEPS audience as well as the financial framework of our foundation.

### **FEPS Policy Briefs and Policy Studies**

FEPS has put at the disposal of both targeted and broader readership two series, which are meant to present outcomes of research and critical analyses of the pertinent contemporary issues alongside clear policy recommendations. Policy Briefs and Policy Studies uphold joint visual identity, while differ in format. They have been vastly used to promote output from many of the FEPS projects and serve as a background for numerous events, breakfast meetings included.



## Annex 1 – 10 Thematic Chapters

1. **SOCIAL EUROPE** – monitoring the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the related Action Plan, deepening the debate on public health, decent work and social protection, and supporting the fight against poverty and inequalities

Social policies are again under attack. With several important concurrent policy objectives and a big portion of European budgets dedicated to the roll-out of the climate and digital transitions, it remains paramount to i) protect European welfare systems, ii) expand rights and services in the areas that have recently shown more criticism and a worsening of inequality, for instance, housing and education and iii) ensure that social objectives remain a cornerstone of all the policies supporting recovery and transitions

Priority one, focusing on a resilient, fair and transformed Europe offers the perfect compass to develop 2024 Social Europe. The starting point is obviously that of delivering on our citizens' expectations on their quality of life, to boost the standards of living.

Necessarily, this brings to a reflection on living costs and access to basic – but quality – services. It forces us also to look more and more into the adaptation and modernisation that are needed to ensure that our welfare system is for the acceleration of the ecological, digital, and demographic transitions.

This task is double-folded. On the one hand, FEPS needs to work on upgrading social policies so that our welfare system remains fit for the deep transformations that these transitions will bring to our lifestyle, our labour-markets, and our education system. On the other hand, FEPS has to support the progressive family in identifying the avenues to include social objects and the means to achieve those in all the other policy discussions pertaining to addressing those transitions. Discussions that unfortunately seldom include a thorough reflection on the implications for well-being, cohesion and justice.

As 2024 is an electoral year, before and right after the European elections, when a new consensus and political direction for Europe will emerge, it is fitting to make the distinctive character of the European society stand out, vis-à-vis that of other international partners and that of the European progressives, vis-à-vis that of other political orientations. Welfare policies are the trait that makes Europe fairer and more equal whilst supporting opportunities and development for all. They are historically the *magnus*

*opus* of social-democratic action and can again serve to invigorate the link between progressive leadership and citizens' support.

### **Relaunching a Social Action Plan for Europe**

The European Pillar of Social Rights ignited a great push on the European social acquis and revived EU legislation to protect workers, their conditions, and representation. Also, thanks to the political leadership exerted by the progressives at the Porto Summit(s) and in the conception of the Social Pillar Action Plan initiatives addressing poverty, inequality, social exclusion and quality of work have flourished: from the work on minimum wages, lifelong learning, childcare and long-term care to SURE and the right to disconnect, just to name a few. Despite the EU legislature coming to an end, the EPSR cannot lose its propulsive energy; progressive action shall keep this important political agenda alive and re-invigorate it with a new action plan for Social Europe looking at facilitating the implementation of the EPSRs in all member states, better integrating social outcomes in the framework of the EU economic, climate, digital and industrial policy and finding new avenues for integration for the expansion of social protection to atypical workers, harmonisation in education and health, minimum income schemes and a permanent SURE.

### **Innovation in Employment and Training**

After many years finally, consensus is emerging that wage growth and the protection of workers' purchasing power is a top European priority. The contributions of the progressives, specifically with the EU directive on adequate minimum wages and the minimum wage in Germany has been fundamental to abandon the paradigm that linked competitiveness to low wages. Now FEPS will continue providing inputs to progressive action to bolster the employment agenda beyond wage protection and identify modern and innovative policies that can deliver on both social and economic outcomes. That can be the case of a 4-day working week and zero unemployment territories that make our society more resilient and can better prepare for the green transition. Policy innovation in the field of employment may also signify a new look at the implications for wellbeing and democracy at the workplace. Other aspects around which innovation is also needed are the interplay between education, training, and employment for instance ensuring a modern and useful implementation of lifelong learning and the interplay between employment and the care sector.

### **Quality of Living: Housing and Health**

Ultimately, the European project will have meaning and support if it helps improving the living standards of European citizens. The progressives strive to enhance socio-economic outcomes for the European people and are committed to a wellbeing agenda. In the current legislature, the European Commission has started to work on "Promoting our European Way of Life" with a somehow narrow

framing, too focused on security and migration issues. Though, some steps have been made also on health with the Health Data Space and the Beating Cancer Plan. Building on the embryonal concept of the European Health Union as well on the right to decent housing protected by the EPSR, it becomes decisive to bolster the ambitions finally identify health and housing policy as areas in which the EU should be more active and impactful, to help member states and local authorities to deliver on the premises of inclusiveness, access, quality and sustainability.

### **Preserving Welfare amidst Stagflation and Demographic Change**

There is overwhelming evidence showing how countries with advanced welfare systems are better placed to respond and recover from crises and are generally more just and resilient. Notwithstanding, and rather counterintuitively, whenever a crisis hits, it is often social expenditure that gets sacrificed. At this moment in time, several budgetary priorities overlap, for instance, the green transition, digital infrastructure, and defence. At the same time, stagflation and demographic change are curbing public revenues. Connected to the work on the modernisation of welfare policy and the new Social Agenda for Europe, FEPS needs to anticipate the problems affecting welfare and work on a convincing narrative to reinforce how social investment, employment policy, safety nets and public services are the lever for prosperous societies. The dominant paradigm still treats social expenditure as a cost, whilst the economic value of inclusion and equality is overlooked. Actions targeted at uncovering the latter could serve the goal of recognizing the value of welfare.

### **The Forgotten Justices: Territorial and Intergenerational Dimensions**

Even if there is a rather solid consensus that addressing the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, climate change and inequality, is a priority, there is still very little awareness that that cannot be done without the cooperation and involvement of different regions and generations. FEPS shall be active in exploring paths that deliver on the expectation of the transitions with a real *no-one-left-behind* approach. The regional and territorial dimensions together with intergenerational justice are aspects that are too often disregarded in policy setting and political strategy. Though social and territorial cohesion are core objectives of our Union. Improving on these fundamental aspects of European justice can be done by redistributive policies, transfers, and taxation or by designing smart conditionalities. Crucially though, it should be done by democratizing decision-making and busting the involvement of local actors and the youth.

2. **ECONOMY AND FINANCE** – designing a resilient and sustainable economic development model, with a goal to forge policy proposals towards a job-rich recovery, fair transitions and more investment-friendly European fiscal and governance rules

The European Union will be facing several crucial decisions regarding economic policies, which will affect both the short and long-term perspectives. While the effects of the pandemic have partially receded, there are still many challenges that have either emerged during COVID-19 or got magnified as the result of asymmetric shocks. There has been and continues to be a failure of neoliberal orthodox policies. In parallel, there are several other issues that emerged and would require an ambitious political reaction.

The core issue is the inflation. It has halved since 2022 but remains at an elevated level of 5.3% (looking at the end of summer 2023). The inadequacy of the response, with an over-reliance on the monetary policy, has drawn the European economy into recession, pointing out the fact that diversifying the macro-toolbox and better fiscal-monetary coordination are needed to prevent the European economy even simply from falling into it any deeper.

When it comes to fiscal policies, the situation is not encouraging either. The fiscal rules package, prepared by the European Commission, is no doubt an improvement on the previous framework. Still, they do not give much room for so badly needed green and social investments. And while till 2026 RRF will provide some of the necessary resources, there is no clarity regarding what would happen after. The most logical solution – a common fiscal instrument, financed by a common EU debt (“sovereignty fund”) – has been rejected so far.

Additionally, the EU needs to be more tactical in its economic policies, which also includes building new industrial policies almost from scratch and aiming at strategic autonomy. The latter has become particularly apparent through the disruptions in the supply of vital materials during the pandemic and the Russian war on Ukraine. From the progressive point of view, this is a moment to completely rework the economy: to “bring back the state”, to foster innovation and to broaden stakeholder’s participation. And do it all in a socially just way.

### **Fighting Inflation and the cost-of-living crisis**

Inflation is a major cause behind the current cost of living crisis. It prevents the recovery and further deepens the gaps, which had remained in the context of income and wealth distribution. Moreover, overreliance on the monetary policy to curb inflation has led to a recession in the EU. The diverse inflation performance in Europe, however, shows that employing tools other than monetary policy is what makes a difference. In that context, FEPS has embarked on projects that examine in detail the negative, disempowering effects the crisis has and explores the ways to counteract, in particular, the so-called profits-led inflation.

### **Reforming the EU economic governance**

The revision of the EU economic governance (fiscal rules) has been a major issue in 2023. The European Commission submitted its proposal in the spring and hoped to have it approved by the end of the year. FEPS has been monitoring the process carefully, and whilst the intentions have been appreciated – the assessment remains that the current draft is limited in its ambition. It falls short in supporting the

Union in its strive for green and social transformation. This is a rationale for which the efforts should continue to advocate for bolder plans that would make the European modernization agenda tangible and would provide much-needed sustainability.

### **Consolidating the new industrial strategy**

The question of the new industrial strategy had been neglected for a very long time and re-discovered in the midst of the debate about modernisation of the European economy and equipping the EU to remain a strong player in the global context. Some of the actions already undertaken led to impressive outcomes – among which especially the adoption of the European Green Deal should be considered. That said, still more needs to be done when it comes to crafting a comprehensive vision, providing adequate legislation, and ways to implement the new rules. Consequently, there is a need for triple-folded thinking – about the regulations, the resources, and the capacity, and about the new benchmarks for progress. FEPS will further pursue the research aiming at developing alternative models and paving path away from the liberal markets paradigm.

### **Forging Economic democracy**

There is an overwhelming sense of disempowerment among the citizens when it comes to the economy. The changes in the organisation of the world of labour translated into a narrowing space for collective actions. The managerial approach to political economy contracted access to the debate regarding the model and the mechanisms, leaving the decisions in the hands of a few and not the many. And the profit-driven logic made some key stakeholders look after their own benefits and gains more than they would care about the common objectives (such as the greening of the economies),. Such a situation is the opposite of conditions for everyone to thrive in building welfare and progress for all. FEPS believes that it is high time to start a project that would look at the ways in which the economy can be *democratised*, both at the macro and micro levels.

### **Making taxation deliver for means for advancing of the social and green agenda**

The staggering wealth and income inequality is hampering the wellbeing and life opportunities for vast number of people. Moreover, the existing tax system is not fit for the green transition, as it does not incentivise sustainable practices – despite the introduction of such valuable tools as the carbon border adjustment mechanism. Consequently, more needs to be done to make the taxation system abide by the principles of fairness and deliver much-needed resources. With this motivation, in 2024 FEPS will focus on advocacy for wealth taxation; analytical work and advocacy on taxation for intergenerational justice (eg. inheritance tax); and taxation of resource use and pollution. The latter should be a tool to achieve several targets simultaneously, such as: curbing the rents that companies receive from simply having access to a particular resource (this may also help combat rent-seeking behavior and corruption); incentivising more efficient resource use and reduction in pollution; and giving the

governments a strong source of income (which can allow reducing taxes on labour, thus enhancing employment and labour income in exchange).

3. **CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT** – addressing the climate emergency and supporting implementation of the European Green Deal, with a commitment to search for further equitable ways to attain ambitious climate targets, create green new jobs and a better mainstream of climate objectives

The latest IPCC report conservatively mentions a fast-closing window of opportunity to limit global warming before it produces cataclysmic consequences and socio-economic devastation. Therefore, on the climate and environment front, progressives face many challenges. The risk that the cost-of-living crisis slows down the climate agenda is tangible, bringing with it the risk of exacerbated climate damages for current and future generations. To face the climate crisis, reforming virtually every aspect of socio-economic governance to match the upcoming challenges of the green transformation in a way that protects the vulnerable has become an existential necessity. This is compounded by the imperative to reverse environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, with repercussions in the responses to food and water security pressures. Populations' resilience must be shored up, notably through better adaptation to climate damages like floods, and droughts amongst others. The European Green Deal's implementation will equally be an opportunity for policy blind spots like social conditionality, the question of skills, and the consequences of its externalisation, to be considered. At the same time, its implementation will be a battleground to avoid back-sliding on the ambition of its measures when practical hurdles are faced. To address these manifold challenges, FEPS projects link the climate and social agenda, notably by producing research on energy poverty, and the labour market consequences of the green transformation. The FEPS climate portfolio plans to equip policymakers with alternative tools to navigate the social consequences of climate transformation and make sure that climate action and well-being are compatible in policy practice, notably through its extensive work on Just Transition. FEPS also plans to provide citizens at large a window into EU policy processes by tracking progress on the European Green Deal, still with a clear moral compass pointing towards social and climate justice.

### **Fighting Energy Poverty**

In the current context marked by a severe energy price hike and the cost-of-living crisis, socioeconomic and environmental considerations have gained growing momentum. At the heart of this lies the need to avoid energy poverty and protect the vulnerable. An answer to this issue would be the implementation of Energy Minimum Rights to ensure citizens, regardless of their status in society, are ensured available, accessible, acceptable, quality and sustainable energy (in line with the triple AQ(S)

standard of international human rights). This crisis comes with a disruptive potential for the European political and economic status quo, and there is potential to introduce improved distribution of energy supplies in order to meet the basic needs of citizens. Energy Minimum Rights also have the capacity to boost the development of energy communities that ensure decentralized energy security.

### **Racing to scale-up clean technologies**

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) passed by the United States has sparked a global race to scale clean technologies and reap the benefits of decarbonization, energy security and industrial leadership. The Act has provided significant tax breaks, grants and loans to various technologies, potentially drawing promising companies to move their activities to the US. As a result, the EU is facing increasing competition in the clean-tech market, despite being a leader in cleantech innovation over the past decade. To address this challenge, the EU must consider adopting a private sector-led and public sector enabled strategy, which includes mobilizing large investments, creating a demand shock, removing regulatory hurdles and building necessary infrastructure. This will help the EU to keep up with the competition posed by the IRA and maintain its position in the global cleantech race.

### **Combatting Climate Injustices**

Facing the challenges posed by climate-change requires wide-scale social, political, and economic transformations that will only be possible with a common and coherent understanding of justice. The scale of the transition requires us to tackle existing socio-economic inequalities that stand in its way and prevent climate policies from having further negative distributional impacts. Given the severity of the problem and its global ramifications, the EU cannot act alone on the question of climate change, meaning that this element of justice is essential on many levels. Avenues for a new global compact of climate justice that takes into account the international, intranational, and intergenerational dimensions of the issue from a global distributive justice perspective are therefore essential.

### **Managing the Labour market upheaval**

The European Commission has already concluded that, for European climate policies to achieve the targets laid out in the European Green Deal (EGD), the fairness of the related transition and a healthy European labour market are essential. While most climate policies tend to increase European well-being in general, it is widely believed that they are detrimental to (short-term) material well-being. To overcome this divide, what is needed is not just better data on the potential effects of various climate policies, but also a deep understanding of various related decision-making processes. Indeed, job destructions and job creations will become repetitive patterns in the coming transformation.

### **Addressing the Territorial Injustices / Biodiversity Loss/ Food & Water Security nexus**

The variegated impact of climate damages stands to generate further regional inequalities, including on the provisions of food and water, as well as the access to a thriving natural environment.

Additionally, the disbursement of EU climate funds poses significant issues for maintaining regional and territorial justice and cohesion. As part of the Just Transition Mechanism that the EU adopted in the framework of the European Green Deal, regions that are affected by the decarbonization of the economy can access a total of EUR 17.5 billion of EU funds in the period between 2021 and 2027. The TJTPs are a welcome development from a social perspective. It remains to be seen whether they can deliver on regional justice and participatory governance and ultimately allow workers, communities, and nature to thrive in the medium to long term.

4. **DIGITAL ECONOMY AND SOCIETY** – assessing the nature and effects of accelerated digitalisation of European societies and economies with an aim of exploring how Europe can pick up autonomous, progressive path towards technological development that serves broader social and economic goals, including here the digitalisation of education, media,

The past years have seen the adoption of a regulatory push from the EU when it comes to digital markets, digital services and data. This reconfirmed Europe's role as the global rule-setter in the digital world. After the GDPR, we now have the Digital Services and Digital Markets Acts and the Data Governance and Data Act in place that could have a Brussels effect far beyond the EU's borders. Two other flagship legislative files, the Platform Work Directive and AI Act, are expected to be adopted in the coming months.

Whether this new regulatory framework is enough to change the dynamics of the digital economy remains to be seen. Past experiences should make us weary and realistic about the effectiveness of rules to stop the trend where the power of Big Tech firms seems to grow exponentially over time. Since the release of Chat GPT 3.5, the realisation has become mainstream that AI and the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution are gathering momentum fast.

The promise of a free and open internet has turned into several walled gardens in the private hands of several tech billionaires. During the first industrial revolution, an unregulated advance of capitalism led to a further commodification of life. We see the same happening in the current industrial revolution, where most internet users' online behaviour is now monetised, formerly personal space can be rented out instantaneously, and gig platforms circumvented labour law to create a workforce that is homogenous, powerless and always available.

The narrative is that the wave of innovation of this industrial revolution will eventually benefit everyone. And yet, history shows that unregulated capitalism creates significant inequality, and



benefits never spread automatically. We see that today, with inequality rising across the board, while a few big tech firms have amassed enormous power and wealth.

### **Framing AI in the workplace**

AI is expected to impact most of the jobs in Europe. This will not only lead to profound changes in the workforce, requiring many Europeans to reskill and upskill. Besides the future of work, the working conditions of more and more workers are already starting to be affected by algorithms in the workplace. The platform workers were at the forefront of this revolution in automatic management, but these practices are spreading to traditional sectors. It raises concerns about workers' rights and the influence of workers representatives. Therefore, working with trade union partners on this issue is interesting. Within EU policy-making, the direction of the AI Act and the Platform Work Directive will be essential and determine whether the EU can set the guardrails for AI to operate human-centric and value-driven.

### **Creating Public Digital Infrastructure**

For a large part, European society depends on US-based Big Tech firms to provide the tools they need in a digitalised world. Tools developed with a profit motive often work based on data hoarding, which not only goes against the privacy of Europeans but also does not fit the needs of civil society or public services in Europe. From a perspective of strategic autonomy and industrial policy, Europe must reduce its dependency on the digital domain. This means investing, for example, in public digital infrastructure that provides European citizens and organisations with alternatives. This is especially relevant for (public) media, education, health, (public) transport, and public services that now have no option but to use the Silicon Valley-created tools on their conditions. They could benefit from an open-source alternative digital ecosystem developed by civic tech based on European values. This could provide solutions for deep-rooted issues in social media that lead to disinformation and mental health issues and even threaten our democracy.

### **Exerting control over data**

After completing the current digital legislative agenda, the question is what is left to legislate regarding the control of Europeans over their data. For a big part, implementing and enforcing the new legal framework set up by the DSA, DMA, and Data Act needs time to show its effect. We cannot relive the experience of the GDPR, where the rules remained a dead letter. Whether the new legislative framework will end the surveillance capitalism model remains doubtful. There are potential further solutions in the form of interoperability and data intermediaries to give Europeans more influence over the use of their data. The European Commission should come forward with proposals on targeted advertisements and dark patterns. For progressives, the issue of data control is not only one of privacy

but also about the division of power and knowledge, which is becoming more and more concentrated in the hands of a few billionaires.

### **Industrial policy for the triple transformation**

Two significant transformations are happening that Europe needs to address. One is the green transition to fight climate change; another is the digital transition with rapid economic and societal changes. Called the twin transitions, there are specific interactions, positive and negative. Digitalisation can come with more energy use and e-waste, but solutions can also be found in green data spaces for sustainable agriculture and transport. With the Inflation Reduction Act, the USA supported their industry and society to make the green transition. The EU is still considering its reaction, but besides supporting the climate transition, it must also develop its digital capabilities. This would mean a departure from the anti-state aid paradigm within the EU single market. In the Resilience and Recovery Fund, we saw that 20% of the money needed to be spent on digitalisation projects, which could be a precedent for further efforts for the EU to support the transformations.

### **Leading digitalisation of public services**

In a digitalised world, public services must stay caught up. European citizens are expecting to be able to interact with the public administrations online. At the same time, we see a significant divergence in the digitalisation of public services within Europe between Member States, which needs to be addressed from a cohesion perspective. Digitalisation is essential for the future of education, but how to deal with things like AI in the classroom is a hotly debated topic. Specific risks are also involved when public administrations start using algorithms to enforce rules, which have proven to lead to discriminatory outcomes. It will need the right capabilities and know-how in the public services sector to ensure digitalisation aligns with public values. Too often, they must rely on external consultants and service providers to build and maintain digital infrastructure, which is costly and often ineffective.

5. **GENDER EQUALITY** – strengthening the commitment to the feminist and gender equality agenda, with a focus on preventing backlash, delivering substantive equality through transformative and gender mainstreamed policies

Gender equality in the EU has developed into a solid policy field. A notable step up from previous EU-level commitments to tackling gender discrimination, the Gender Equality Strategy delineating policy objectives to advance towards gender equality by 2025 recognises the promotion of gender equality as “a task for the Union, in all its activities” based on a dual approach combining targeted measures with effective gender mainstreaming. Just in the past few years, the EU made historic wins for women’s rights with the adoption of the long-awaited Women on Boards Directive, the Directive on Pay

Transparency, the Care Strategy as well as two proposals on a Directive on Violence against Women and on Standards for Equality Bodies.

However, gender equality continues to be met with strong resistance. Several member states have experienced unprecedented processes of de-democratisation with terrible consequences for equality and social justice. The rise of far-right parties with explicit anti-gender, anti-feminist, anti-migration and LGBTIQ-phobic views may eventually force political institutions to become less vocal about their equality agendas with spill-over effects, including rollbacks on gender equality commitments. Consistent anti-gender and conservative voices have systematically attempted to remove the words “gender (equality)” from previously agreed EU policy documents, thereby undermining further progress. Successive crises – Covid-19, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, energy and climate crisis, galloping inflation, etc.– have significantly slowed down (if not reversed) gender equality advances. For the first time in a decade, gender inequalities have [increased](#) in employment, education, health status and access to health services.

Therefore, as the end of its term is nearing, time is opportune to assess to what extent the Commission’s stated objective to promote a “Union of Equality” has been achieved and which new challenges have arisen. With the 2024 EU elections on the horizon along with defining of the priorities for the next legislative period, a robust commitment to gender equality will be essential.

### **Boosting Institutionalised Mechanisms for Gender Transformative Policy Action**

Even though gender-balanced representation is crucial in democracy, women remain underrepresented in public offices. In the EU, only [22.2%](#) of ministers are women in 2023 and women’s representation in parliaments stagnates at [31%](#). Although examples of female climate leadership, including (then) Prime Minister Marin who pushed for net zero emissions abound, women continue to be under-represented in climate decision-making, representing 34% of country negotiating teams and only 7 out of 110 Heads of State present [at COP27](#). Likewise, evidence shows that women’s participation increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting fifteen years by [35%](#). Yet, about seven out of every ten peace processes still did not include women mediators or women signatories. In the wake of the EU elections and the subsequent distribution of key portfolios, it is therefore crucial to consider strategies for the strengthening of gender balanced political participation and women’s effective influence.

### **Closing the Social Protection Gender Gaps**

Women in the EU are [more exposed](#) to poverty or social exclusion. Over [one fifth](#) of the EU population in households with children was concerned. Whilst 85% of single-parent families are headed by

women, [42%](#) of those were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. With a gender pension gap averaging 30%, women are more likely to fall below the poverty line with age. Well-designed social protection systems can narrow gender gaps in poverty rates, enhance women's income security and access to personal income, offer a lifeline for women, as well as provide inclusive and LGBT-friendly family policies. The current context of spiralling inflation and fiscal adjustments, however, places big constraints on the investments needed to achieve these goals. A key question to be addressed here is therefore how the EU can boost member states to promote gender-responsive social protection in a context of demographic challenge and persisting gender inequalities.

### **Overcoming Political Struggles for a Europe Free from Gendered Violence**

The EU has significantly stepped up its fight against gender-based violence. However, as [FEPS research shows](#), today's context is worryingly shaped by the backlash of anti-gender movements making it a highly contested issue in EU politics. The EU's formal accession to the Istanbul Convention constitutes a major victory but only represents the very start of a much longer journey: following the contested political battle for ratification, the EU will need to align with its new obligations set by the Convention whilst ensuring member states' implementation. Likewise, ahead of the trilogue negotiations on the directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence, several pitfalls remain on the way, including the introduction of consent-based legislation advocated for by feminist stakeholders and the European Parliament but opposed by member states in the [Council](#). The pursuit of gender equality will require strong coordinated efforts amongst progressive actors and necessitate to prioritise the field.

### **Completing the EU Strategy for Women's Health**

Sex and gender directly impact individuals' health and wellbeing. Due to limited availability of adequate reproductive and sexual health services, an estimated [500 000 women](#) in Europe do not have access to healthcare during the first months of pregnancy. A disproportionate share of women are informal carers, which also affects their mental health. Medical research often fails to account for women who, as a result, are twice as likely to develop adverse drug reactions or to suffer serious underdiagnosis. Likewise, gender-specific conditions lack sufficient public attention such as endometriosis, obstetric violence or menopause. Women's pain levels are frequently underestimated which results in treatment delays. Moreover, women belonging to vulnerable social groups are acutely concerned by the lack of availability and access to adequate and affordable services. EU health policy will remain an unfinished agenda without a proper commitment to reduce health inequalities and to provide equitable health for all women.

### **Forging a Feminist Perspectives on Global Affairs**

Equality is not possible without increasing diversity of representation in multilateral spaces. Simply increasing the number of women in decision-making roles won't suffice. Systems of oppression must be tackled at their very roots. Women's, girls', and LGBTIQ people's rights are under threat globally, with issues such as limited access to abortion or human rights violations based on sexual identity or orientation being of major concern. Therefore, an intersectional feminist foreign policy (FFP) constitutes the first step in a global governance system building on feminist and rights-based values. Time is ripe to shift from traditional forms of foreign policy towards one that places its target groups at the front and centre. In the wake of unending global challenges, an intersectional and feminist approach to foreign affairs offers hope for transformational leadership we can all trust – one that is unequivocally the way forward.

6. **POLITICAL EUROPE** – examining the functioning of and potential for the reforms within the institutional architecture of the European Union, with a mission to inspire the transition to a new model of integration that will allow for further deepening and enlargement

The Conference on the Future of Europe has been unfavourably considered by many as missed opportunity, which had been created too late and faded away too quickly. Still, it was certainly an important reference point and an initiative, which reminded all the stakeholders how much depends on formulating a new political consensus and recreating an alliance powered by both politicians and citizens to support it. There is no doubt that the EU has to consider its' global role and how it can both speak and act united externally. There is no illusion regarding the need for the new partnership and neighbourhood policies, as also there is an expectation to deliver tangible progress when it comes to enlargement. Finally, it has become abundantly clear that while strengthening and expanding is in geopolitical existential interest, in order to succeed the Union has to deepen and hence reform in parallel.

The process of institutional reform has been discussed with an outlook at the Treaties reform, which idea currently still causes much of stir. Currently, there are both proponents and opponents of the next intergovernmental conference among both the EU actors and the national stakeholders. But it is worth reminding that among proponents, there are also several governments that would like to use it as an opportunity to narrow Europe's prerogatives. While the progressives find the constructive ways to operate within the current architecture and deliver much needed reforms, next to valuable proposals on how to make the most of the current set up – there is also a greater appetite for a more ambitious agenda. The goal there would be to empower, enhance and emancipate the Union –

equipping it with new mechanisms thanks to which it can decide and deliver upon the hopes entrusted in it.

### **Deliberating the architecture of the Political Union**

FEPS had been taking the initiative to discuss the Future of Europe in its pioneering book “Our European Future”, which was first of the kind on the market and remains a unique compendium of the progressive proposals to forge a functional, effective, and transparent institutional system that the EU needs. It has been translated into several languages and serves as a reference point already for several legislative proposals. The work of the High-Level Working Group has continued and still in 2023 a new collective report will be issued to answer the question about what kind of approach towards the institutional architecture can facilitate delivering the backbone of a Social Europe. The research and deliberations will continue in 2024, featuring further discussions on potential treaties reform and on updating a handful of mechanisms (including those of decision-taking processes and those, that should enable the EU’s action in cases of bridges to the fundamental values and the rule of law).

### **Strengthening the Europarties and preparing the ground for the electoral reform**

The Europeanisation of the national public sphere progressed both in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe and midst of crises (such as the pandemic, when hopes were connected with finding a common European way for recovery and modernization). Progressive governments have obvious achievements when it comes to speaking about the EU and presenting the diverse decisions’ rationale to the citizens in their respective countries. And these factors offer an additional impetus to the research and discussion on how to enhance the representative and deliberative parts of the European democracy. FEPS has been proudly leading in those debates and in 2023 will come with another set of recommendations for strengthening of the europarties, better use of the Spitzenkandidate system, and paths that could bring back the question of the reform of the transnational electoral system. Following the campaign in 2024 and its aftermath, there will certainly be many takeaways and new items to explore.

### **Preparing the Enlargement**

2022 – 2023 have seen several groundbreaking announcements regarding enlargement. Starting from the EU – Western Balkan Summit and accepting the applications from Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia – pressure grew for both the Union and the applicant countries to start being more concrete in commitments. Speaking in Prague, Chancellor Olaf Scholz indicated the ambition for the Union of 35 or so members, underlining that the integration process had been incomplete. But while there are potential dates being named for when the accession of the new countries could realistically take place, there is also a clear understanding that the process needs to be thorough (showing improvement and

preventing mistakes from 2004), and consequently, both sides need to be well prepared. In parallel, there are also other conversations taking place – especially regarding concepts such as the European Political Community, which can forge closer cooperation with the applicant and other countries in Europe already now. Amidst that, there is a need for progressive scenarios forward, for building common understanding, and forging common policies. FEPS has a proud tradition of working on those issues and intends to continue in 2024 and beyond.

7. **DEFENDING AND DEEPENING DEMOCRACY** – analysing the main threats to democracy (nationalism, right-wing extremism and authoritarian tendencies) inside but also outside the European Union – in order to find ways to foster participatory and representative democracy

As outlined in priority 2 of the FAP, the Democracy thematic portfolio targets urgent threats like nationalism, right-wing extremism, and authoritarianism. Recent V-Dem data underscores the urgency: 72% of the global population lives under autocracies, and Eastern Europe's democracy has regressed to post-Cold War levels. These are not isolated phenomena but symptoms of interconnected crises, from economic insecurity and extreme wealth inequality to uncertainties caused by the looming ecological transition. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing cost of living crises has only exacerbated these issues.

This complex crisis has emboldened right-wing populism in Europe. Most recent examples include Germany's AfD polling as the second-largest party, the continued erosion of rule-of-law in Hungary and Poland, and far-right electoral gains in Greece and government coalitions including radical right party in Finland. At the EU level, conservative-far-right alliances have actively opposed progressive green transition laws.

While crises are often exploited by anti-democratic forces, underlying them are deeper structural problems, such as the inadequacies of political parties in meeting citizens' needs and low public trust in institutions. To overcome this, social democrats need to offer sustainable, long-term solutions to restore trust and active citizenship. This could include exploring more direct and deliberative democratic processes and taking full advantage of rapidly developing digital opportunities, but also being aware of their pitfalls - including the integrity of elections and avoiding ethical missteps.

For 2024, the portfolio will focus on three pillars: threats to democracy, deepening democracy, and cross-cutting issues, targeting five priority areas. By consolidating existing research strands (Issues 1 to 3), carefully developing expertise in new themes (Issue 4) and encouraging portfolio collaboration

(Issue 5), the portfolio aims to provide a balanced, adaptive strategy for confronting democracy's most pressing challenges for developing progressive politics in Europe.

### **Safeguarding democracy from authoritarian, nationalist and neo-fascists shifts**

The rise of anti-democratic far-right parties in Europe remains a central concern, especially as effective, catch all, counter-strategies are elusive. One concerning trend is the rightward shift of centre-right parties on issues like migration and minority rights, aimed at retaining or recapturing voters from the radical right. Despite evidence showing this strategy's ineffectiveness during elections, it persists, contributing to mainstreaming anti-pluralist sentiment and risking radicalising political centrism. Understanding this phenomenon, especially its implications for social democrats, with an eye to the European Elections is critical. A project launching in mid-2023 and extending into 2024 will focus on comprehensively exploring this issue. This closely ties in with the challenges outlined in FAP priority two for a Democratic and Enlarged Europe.

### **Equipping the European policy making in times of rise of the the far right**

The influence of political radicalization is not confined to election campaigns but permeates policy-making. When far-right parties are in power, they often dismantle institutional checks and balances, exemplified by Poland and Hungary. Newer entrants to political power, like Italy's radical right may start instead with threats of introducing anti-pluralist legislation. Even when not officially in government, these parties can wield outsized influence, as in Sweden, where the Swedish Democrats support for a minority government has led to a rightward shift on immigration. Importantly, this is not just a national issue. Attempts by far-right and center-right alliances to scuttle key climate initiatives in the European Parliament underscore their broader reach.

Looning ahead into a new five-year European legislative cycle, one featuring a wave of new social democratic policymakers, there's an urgent need to consolidate existing strategies for countering far-right influence in the policy making domain. Aligning these strategies with the emerging power balances post-June 2024 will better equip FEPS stakeholders to anticipate and address challenges, arming them with a knowledge-based toolkit for effective response.

### **Empowering young people for better quality of democracy**

Facing uncertain futures, millennials and Gen Z in many EU Member States are the first generations not expected to surpass their parents in living or career standards. Additionally, many young people feel disconnected from institutional politics. This is particularly true for the disadvantaged, as ongoing FEPS research indicates. This disconnect is concerning not only for the future of democracy but also for social democrats who struggle to attract young voters. Therefore, it is critical to closely



analyse the youth vote in the 2024 European legislative elections to understand why young people have or have not voted and what priorities they have voted on.

Such understanding can be a critical component for building a progressive youth vision for the next European legislative term that offers some predictability to young people in unstable times, fulfilling an obligation of inter-generational solidarity. This commitment aligns with FEPS' priorities of intergenerational justice and analyzing the 2024 elections .

### **Bringing democracy closer: local, participative, and deliberative democracy**

Improving democracies is vital, especially as their vulnerabilities often embolden adversaries. A key concern is restoring trust and participation in liberal democratic systems, particularly among lower-income groups whose trust in democratic institutions has never recovered after the 2008 financial crisis. Recent events like the 2023 protests against France's pension reform underscore this trust deficit and sentiment, of having been ignored.

Alternative democratic formats, like civic assemblies using sortition, can augment traditional representation by offering direct participation and political impact for citizens. However, instances like the Conference of Europe or France's climate assemblies are cautious examples that failing to act, watering or slowing down the implementation of citizen recommendations can exacerbate distrust.

In 2024, FEPS and its member TASC will launch a project focused on individual engagement in democratic processes. The objective is to understand why and how people engage, particularly at the local level, and to discern what motivates active participants versus disengaged ones. The ultimate aim is to guide EU policymakers in prioritizing democracy-strengthening initiatives, from funding to policy input. This aligns with the aim of fostering a genuinely citizen-centric Europe, as articulated in FAP priority two.

### **Making Democracy a cross cutting issue:**

Democratic challenges intersect with key societal issues in various FEPS portfolios. Some key questions in this regard are: How does the backlash against women and LGBTQI+ communities in some EU states affect these countries status as liberal democracies? How do we make the green transition not only equitable but also participatory to avoid social backlashes? Are progressive parties ready for the digital revolution's impact on democracy, such as election integrity (as highlighted in the current defence of democracy package of the European Commission) and digital civic engagement?

Given our "less is more" ethos and focus on refining existing efforts (as per issues 1-3) and cautiously developing new expertise (as per issue 4), these themes cannot be elevated to a priority status within the Democracy Portfolio. Hence, cross-collaboration with other FEPS portfolios is crucial. This collaboration may offer an exploratory platform for pinpointing future work areas (such as those above) and starting to forming specialized networks. Depending on Europe's shifting policy needs, these could be key for post-2024 initiatives.

8. **MIGRATION** –informing and sustaining the debate on asylum and migration, with a special focus on defining the features of efficient and humane management of migration and on developing fair and balanced relations with the countries of origin and transit; whilst analysing the nexus between demographic changes in Europe and migration dynamics

The first months of 2024 will be marked by the efforts of the European Commission, Parliament and Council to broker a final (and tormented) agreement on the Pact on Migration and Asylum, initially proposed by the Commission in September 2020. While the outcome of the negotiations is still unpredictable (due to the still profound political differences among the EU member states and the growing and widespread hostility towards migrants and asylum seekers), the main features of the Pact remain, according to many observers, highly disputable. Therefore, much is still to be done to ensure that European migration and asylum policy will be underpinned by a fair, humane and effective approach. In the course of 2024, FEPS' efforts will focus on the identification of alternative migration and integration schemes, that ensure the respect of migrants' rights and well-being and prevent their social and economic exclusion. As a significant (albeit far from overwhelming) part of migration inflows to Europe comes from Africa, different aspects of the relations between the European Union and the African countries of origin and transit will be at the core of FEPS analysis, with the aim of suggesting measures to reduce a strategy strongly based on externalisation, and supporting cooperation founded on the mutual recognition of interests and priorities. Finally, considering the changing demographics in Europe and Africa, the ageing of European societies and the growth of the African population, the interplay of these developments and migration dynamics will be another (and still unexplored for FEPS) field of work in the year to come.

### **Continuing Progressive Migration Group**

The Progressive Migration Group – previously FEPS Global Migration Group – started its work in 2018. In 2023, in a renewed format with a balanced participation of European and African experts, it tackled issues like the interplay between development aid and migration policies, European's externalisation of migration policies and the importance of remittances for the African countries of origin. In 2024, the Group will continue its work of analysis, increasingly devoting its attention to the African

perspectives and interests, further tackling the question of development and remittances, and focusing also on the gender dimension of migration.

### **Investigating institutional racism**

In a European political context of increasing intolerance towards migrants and asylum seekers, fed by right and extreme right movements and parties, it is necessary to investigate a largely hidden phenomenon, that of the subtle but structural racism that pervades institutions at national and European levels and that contribute to the social and economic exclusions or marginalisation of migrants in the EU. Racism goes beyond hate speeches and acts, and it is reflected in systematic behaviours and practices that result in the harmful treatment and consequent disadvantage of individuals on the basis of their ethnicity, and that in turns legitimise similar attitudes towards newcomers by the native population.

### **Exploring interplay between demographics and migration**

It is a well-known fact that Europe societies are ageing, and that these trends in the coming decades will impact the European labour forces and social services. On the other side of the Mediterranean see, on the other hand, there is a vibrant and growing continent with a largely young population. How will the interplay between these two trends be? How will they affect European policies and African development? How do current European policies will impact demographics and migration? What kind of migration is to be expected? How can migration policies can be reformed to respond to these trends?

9. **EUROPE IN THE WORLD** – focusing on the EU’s role in striving for peace and development in a new multipolar global order, nurturing transatlantic relations but also stronger ties with the Global south, with a focus on foresight capabilities, European Strategic Autonomy, and EU’s commitment to the reconstruction and rebuilding of Ukraine

Europe’s strategic context is such that security and defence issues are going to remain high on the agenda for the foreseeable future. In an increasingly polarized, insecure, militarized, and hostile international environment, progressives will continue to be challenged in their attempts to build a multilateral order and manage global interdependence by creating socially responsible and mutually beneficial long-term partnerships. Against this backdrop, the EU should become a stronger, geopolitical actor, not at the cost of other priorities and policies, but by advancing them under a larger strategic framework. The latter entails an enlarged and democratic Union with progressive mindset and action plan at the core.

The thematic field “Europe in the World” will explore EU’s strive for a socially responsible, progressive approach to manage the changing strategic and security landscape. In a way that connects with, and does not displace, other goals central to Europe’s future (such as the green transition, the reform of the EU’s governance, technological innovation, enlargement and adequate investment in public services). That requires an open, inclusive debate and action to mutually reinforce political, defence, economic, social, technological and ecological objectives.

### **Strengthening the EU’s response to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine**

The outcome of the war and Ukraine’s (post)war rebuild process can be considered pivotal to an effective and sustainable model of peace and security order in Europe and beyond. For this model to succeed: 1). In addition to state security guarantees, Ukraine requires an alternative, socially responsible recovery and transformation model, able to strengthen the social contract, and providing social security guarantees to the citizens (including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups); 2). The EU’s enlargement process must become an integral element of Europe’s peace and security architecture. The EU needs to develop and implement a more progressive philosophy – a political, empathic approach which focuses on strategic engagement and partnership (not strategic ambiguity), guided by a long-term calculus of the strategic benefits of enlargement (not short-term political objections).

### **Addressing the fragility of multilateralism and rethinking its foundations**

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has amplified the US-China rivalry. It has also demonstrated that an increasing number of countries in the Global South entertain growing ambitions of foreign-policy autonomy and non-alignment with the West (e.g., developments around BRICS). Multipolar competition in Africa and Latin America has intensified. A more hostile geostrategic reality requires a more pragmatic, sober but nevertheless determined approach to sustain multilateralism. The EU should not follow other powers in a sheer competition for seizing markets and resources but strive to shape more appealing offers that bridge the short-term needs and long-term priorities of partners, avoiding a tug-of-war over exclusive spheres of influence to enable de-escalation and cooperation. The latter requires an intellectual reflection followed by a progressive policy elaboration of the nature of such new offer(s) for the EU partners.

### **Preparing for and addressing (the uncertain) future of transatlantic relations**

War in Ukraine confirmed Washington’s foundational role as a security provider for Europe. Yet, a potential return of Donald Trump to the White House is likely to produce another seismic effect on the domestic front, with major repercussions for the shape of the strategic and security landscape far and beyond the US. In response, the EU should not abandon the pursuit of European strategic autonomy.

However, it should be ready to entertain a more pragmatic approach which can lead to incremental progress in areas key for its peaceful and sustainable future. For example, on defence, Europeans should take more responsibility for their security and that of neighbouring regions, in ways that complement the role of NATO. Progressives are well positioned to lead European self-reflection about the need to achieve more balance in transatlantic relations, all while working on measures to address overreliance on the US as the (hard) security provider.

### **Addressing (hyper)securitization of global affairs and its impact on democratic governance**

A deep overview and strengthening of the existing system of checks and balances is key to ensure that security-driven measures improve the resilience of (supra)national democratic systems against malign (foreign and domestic) actors without affecting their foundations. In the coming years, it will be crucial to elaborate on the approach and instruments required to strike the right balance between the necessary measures to enhance security and broader resilience of the EU and individual member-states, and the preservation of an open society and of all categories of individual rights from the risk of encroachment by state authorities on security grounds. Whether democratic oversight and a sound, inclusive public debate shapes this trend, or the latter spins out of control and takes the form of hyper-securitisation, will make a big difference to the quality of politics and democracy. Progressives are uniquely positioned to respond to these challenges through a citizen-centred approach.

10. **FUTURE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY** – evaluating the positioning of the progressive forces, with a focus on their programmatic and strategic dilemmas, organisational difficulties and electoral appeal, governing capacities and abilities to remain constructive opposition.

The legislative period 2019 – 2024 brought mixed tides for social democracy. On the European level, Progressives entered the mandate as the second largest group in the European Parliament and with no President of the European Commission or Council. At the same time, their coordinated strategy within the institutions and in between the EU – national levels allowed them to claim dominant political position in framing crucial, lasting strategies for Europe. They have led on several portfolios and there is a plentiful of reasons to be proud of the legacy. This makes an obligation to further work on ensuring political primacy for the future of the EU pivotal – both to safeguard the achievements and ensure further progress. Especially, that following the polls – the post-electoral circumstances will see the EP more fragmented and the Council with more right-wing radical voices than ever before.

On the national level, social democrats have managed to overcome in many places the criticism of being “old parties” and instead provided citizens with much appreciated sense of security, stability and

composed leadership in the trial times (when facing pandemics or in the moment of the Russian aggression onto Ukraine). Still, though polls showed positive change in the ways people perceived the centre left and there have been several elections that reflected it, there have been several votes that pushed progressives out of the government, weakened its ranks in the respective national parliaments or even led to questioning their future. Though the situations differ from country to country, the questions about the vision and programme for the future, the socio-demographic embedding and the electoral appeal, the ability to mobilise and enter alliances, the capacity to govern and to be a powerful force of the opposition – remain valid. Analysing them in the short, medium and long term perspective lays therefore at the core of the preoccupation of FEPS for 2024.

### **Interpreting Progressive values and anticipating the challenges ahead**

Social democrats have been consistent in terms of articulating their ideological credo, but they also have been frequently entering monumental internal disagreements about the interpretation of the principles and their translation into policy proposals. Following the years marked with crisis management in the face of harsh global developments, it is a high time to reflect about what the core values mean nowadays and what sort of a compass they provide when responding to the crucial questions of the contemporary times. Among these is the vision for Europe and the concept state that can serve as a social contract in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is there also intrinsic connection with attempting to use the ideological framework to embark on the creative part of deliberative processes, and hence also the discussions on the future of Social Democracy especially within the Next Left Programme have to help identifying the coming challenges alongside the ways that the progressive answer can respond to the citizens needs and aspirations in a modern, fair and convincing manner.

### **Defining Progressive alliances and embracing pluralism of the left**

The electoral tendencies of the last year's show that there is a deterioration of the strength of the so-called traditional parties, which process is accompanied by the fragmentation of the political spectrum and radicalisation that leads to raise of former fringe organisations. Against this backdrop and due to internal challenges, social democrats have been more than less frequently seeing that even finishing the electoral battle with the first position isn't synonymous with winning them. As also that there is a need to rethink the strategy of coalitions, not only in governmental and electoral sense. Here social democrats must come to terms with the growing plurality of the left, as also transformation that has taken place within the civil society. The questions to answer here are not only tactical, but doctrinal (as for example future of eco-socialist agenda) and they need to be at the core of deliberations.

### **Preparing to win elections and (re)gaining the electoral appeal**

Every generation brings a difference to the ways the communities are formed and the society functions. Then, also, the civilisational developments mean transformation of the way work is organised, which consequently impacts the organisation of not only labour force but also all the infrastructure around – from public institutions and public goods provision, through agglomeration planning, to consumers preferences and life choices. These go hand in hand with the altering aspirations and expectations from the citizens, giving then the fertile ground to the new articulation of conflicts and hence new demarcation lines for political divisions. With the weakening of what used to be “core electorates” and growing volatility of voters, understanding the electoral dynamics require further research. The question it should serve is the fundamental one: whom does social democracy includes today and whom it can and should aspire to represent more, and how?

### **Boosting Governing capacity and sharing the best examples**

One of the important aspects of the pan-European debate about the future of social democracy is about paying attention to nuances and creating possibilities for mutual learning. This comes with knowledge about reasons for which respective sister parties were successful or to the contrary failed, what methods they chose and which benchmarks they set for their renewal strategies, and to that end in which way they defined their path (back) to power strategically and organisationally speaking. And then, also, what made their governance (on local, municipal, regional, national etc. levels) distinctively progressive. To enable such an exchange, FEPS together with its Network of members is best position to organise lectures, symposia and conferences involving the key stakeholders, but also to support the movement with specific research devoted to the country case studies.

### **Supporting Social Democracy in the CEE and in applicant countries**

Though social democracy is an internationalist movement, for their parties national context, respective history and political systems matter a great deal. To that end, when looking at the map of Europe and identifying the places where social democrats have been struggling much, the region of the Central and Eastern Europe (with some exception) stands out. That is especially if to remember how many governments were in the hands of the centre-left at the moment of these countries accession to the EU. With that in mind, in 2024 FEPS will enhance its existing efforts directed at supporting the renewal and strengthening of the progressives in that region, alongside enhancing coherence between the debates within the centre-left inside of the EU and in the EU applicant countries.

