



**2025 Framework Activity Programme
of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies
(FEPS)**

Year 2025

THE PROGRESSIVE DRIVE FOR EUROPE

Brussels, 26th September 2024

Chapters and page references

Page 3		I. FEPS FAP 2025: DEFINING THE TRAJECTORY FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS
Page 19		II. MISSION HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2025: TO BE INSPIRING, INSTRUCTIVE AND IMPACTFUL
Page 22		III. CORE THEMES AND FUNCTIONS: POLICY FIELDS WITH LONG-TERM COMMITMENT
Page 31		IV. FEPS ANNUAL ACTIVITIES AND FLAGSHIP PROGRAMMES
Page 30		V. FEPS COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS
Page 42		ANNEX 1 – 10 THEMATIC FIELDS

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 coming year, 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 and Party of European Socialist Women, 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 grant application upon the European Parliament's call. Then it provides the guidelines for the FEPS Work Plan and subsequent project proposal calls.

The FEPS Framework Activity Programme 2025 was drafted following a procedure announced to the FEPS Bureau (4th April 2024). The steps leading to Draft 05 presented herewith included: initial discussion on the FAP 2025 priorities with the FEPS Scientific Council (11th April), exchange with the Members of the FEPS Core Team and FEPS Team at the Strategic Seminar (12th April), the inputs from the FEPS Members (Meeting on 26th April), the Core Team (on 6th and 12th June) and the FEPS Bureau (on 13th June). Then Draft 04 was presented and subsequently endorsed by the FEPS General Assembly (20th June). Afterward, over the summer period, the document was distributed among the FEPS members and FEPS Team in order to complete the work, supplementing it also with more detailed chapters on the state of social democracy in Europe and when it comes to priorities within the 10 Thematic Fields. That paved the way for this version, which is now being presented to the FEPS Bureau for adoption. Once approved, it will become the basis for the Grant Application for FEPS from the EP (submission date: end of September 2024).

I | FEPS FAP 2025: DEFINING THE TRAJECTORY FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS

At the beginning of 2025, the European Union will fully enter into a new Chapter. However, it will not begin as *tabula rasa*. The leadership and the mandate of the European institutions have been determined by the results of the European elections and the subsequent negotiations, as well as by the changes to the composition of the European Council. The turbulent process of establishing a new European Commission is likely to weigh heavily, while at the same time, this seems only to be a prelude to the new political season. It is becoming clear that the political tectonic shifts will affect the traditional ways of conducting European politics, transforming the character of intra-institutional and inner-institutional cooperation. The culture of the multifaceted compromise will be prone to be further challenged by those centrifugal forces in power, who may hope to keep the processes hostage to their respective selfish and misguided interests. Consequently, the struggle will have to continue to keep the EU's focus on constructive and relevant important issues, while disallowing the disruptive forces to consume the entire attention. And it will not be a straightforward strategy, since the grand pro-European coalition (as the alliance behind the vote for the new Commission's President had been labeled) is fragile and there are reasons to believe that it will be further tested during the votes on the dossiers. There is a fear that then a different set of majorities, including right-radical right may always appear considerable. In parallel, the changing global context emerging amid the persistent poly-crisis will add to pressures. It will further stretch the current institutional, procedural, and resource limitations. Especially in the previous mandate, 2019 – 2024, the EU has made many promises and pledges of expansion, and it will be under scrutiny to deliver. Against this backdrop, all the stakeholders will have a profound choice to make: to let the EU drift or to gather all the powers and steer it into a new trajectory.

For the Progressives, the principal decision of what to do next is obvious. It derives from a sense of historical responsibility and the motivation to build on the proud legacy of European integration. Following the 2024 European Elections, the PES family (S&D Group) has remained the second-largest group in the European Parliament – which they have been since the beginning of the century. But more than the numbers, it has always been its determination that has translated into an ability to ensure political leadership and the primacy of progressive ideas on key issues. Hence, despite the complex and difficult circumstances, there is no lack of ambition or commitment to the cause. On the contrary, there is preparedness and eagerness to assume the key role in paving the path toward the Union, which is a global power able to forge peace and uphold international commitments; the Union that embodies a daring vision of empowering community and social progress for all; and the Union that is strong by the democratic mandate and values-anchored backbone.

But in order to succeed, the PES family – with all the stakeholders and organisations – will need to be united, coherent and mutually supportive. Being the second group in the European Parliament and having presented 4 Commissioners – two of whom will most likely be the Executive Vice President permits counting on the fact that many of the policy initiatives’ proposals presented within the PES Manifesto will stand a chance of being implemented. Consequently, understanding the nature of the political change and building on the power of constructive perseverance manifested by the Progressive movement, FEPS - as the European think tank of the family - carries an obligation to help think long-term, strategise medium-term and analyse short-term. It will continue being a laboratory of groundbreaking ideas, a connecting point for multidisciplinary networks, a space of learning, and an aula for key conversations. In that spirit, the herewith presented FAP 2025 is drafted – pinpointing the key objectives it sets for itself both in the upcoming twelve months in particular and for the length of the new legislative period in general.

I.A The proud progressive legacy of 2019 - 2024

The mandate 2019 – 2024 was possibly the most turbulent chapter within the history of European Integration since the adoption of the Treaty of Rome. Its main feature was a so-called *poly-crisis* – which entered into a peak phase after having been unfolding starting from persistent consequences of the great financial crash of 2007-2008, through the times of the worldwide COVID pandemic and amid the crisis that followed the brutal Russian invasion in Ukraine. In parallel, the EU has been struggling to answer the profound questions regarding its capacity to remain a global power. It hasn’t been only about its position as a global player of a consequence but also about its ability to deliver on such commitments as Sustainable Development Goals or agenda to fight climate change. And this amid trying to sort out internal, existential questions following Brexit and actions undermining the EU core values on the part of some of the Member States. It has been clear that the EU has been in need of profound reform to transform in order to remain a Community with bright prospects and the ability to keep the promise of being a project forging a path to equality, prosperity and social progress for all.

What was different compared to the previous years was that the EU tried to face these and other trials as a Community. Despite the usual divide between those who fashioned themselves as frugal and the others, it was possible to conceive together an ambitious plan for *Next Generation EU*, with the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) as its centerpiece. The difference they made is unprecedented already (as also illustrated in the FEPS Recovery Watch publications). And the logic with which it was designed showed that, unlike in the times of austerity, the Union learned its lessons and was ready to do more than just manage. It was determined to bounce back not to the previous levels but to a new bar of ambition. And to accomplish that, it needed to modernise and re-emerge stronger.

Thus, the EU stood tall with the ambition to govern, responding to the crisis while simultaneously trying to reform. It attempted to manage the poly-crisis and cushion its impacts without compromising on principles and without straying from the forward-looking perspective. The Socialists and Social Democrats, who held key positions – in the European Council, the European Commission, and the European Parliament, sought additionally an understanding that this was not the time to shrink but to expand – particularly if the EU was to live up to the promise of protecting its citizens. This is also why there was no retreat but enhancement in the diverse dimensions of the Social Europe policies – with serious progress in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and new commitments for the future (as enshrined in the La Hulpe Declaration), with new tools such as SURE mechanism, with fair minimum wage scheme, and with a new approach to digitalisation (both when it comes to framing rules for AI, as also for setting new understanding of the working time and conditions). There were advancements in areas of strategic investments and regional cohesion, preparing the foundations for what could be a strategy for competitiveness that would help elevate all across the EU. And there were more efforts paid to ensure equal rights for men and women, to fight gender-based (also domestic) violence and to address inequalities within the *care economy*. To that end, the questions of *democracy under stress* have also been addressed, for which the consequent application of the conditionality mechanism towards Member States violating the rule of law was exemplary. Dissimilar to the austerity strategy pursued a decade earlier, there was no withdrawal from global responsibilities – the EU has been standing unwavering in solidarity with Ukraine, it has adopted an incredibly ambitious strategy to fight climate change (including here the EU Green Deal) and it has acted for global justice (of which its demand for corporate sustainability due diligence directive is an example of). These and several other proud examples prove two points: *when there is a will, there is a way*, as also that *Progressives can determine the course of political developments even if they are not the most numerous across the EU institutions*. Despite not leading in numbers, they have been leading when it comes to influencing policies.

The resilience, responsiveness, and readiness to act beyond the strict letter of the Treaties translated into a change of attitudes among the citizens across the Union. The surveys show somewhat consistent growing approval of the EU policies and the fact that the citizens are content with the respective Member States' EU memberships. Hence, even if the euro-septic camps have been noting gains, the opposite is to be said when it comes to supporting for an outright “-exit” agenda of any kind.

At the same time, however, the same respondents point to their dissatisfaction with the world of politics, point to their sense of disempowerment, and their disbelief that *anyone* is capable of solving the issues they care the most for – such as the *cost of living crisis*. The young people, in particular,

underline that they doubt if politics can reassure them in these troubled times and have a hard time connecting with the political class, perceiving these as elites driven by a very different code of values (see FEPS and Karl Renner Institut Next Left Progressive Polsters Discussion, as also published outcomes of the FEPS Project “Builders of Progress”). This picture is striking, as it also brings forward a very different idea of what the citizens effectively desire and demand the EU to be and do, and consequently seems to be suggesting that the priorities have shifted since the time of the Conference on the Future of Europe. This underpins the hesitation and openness to rediscuss – especially under the pressures of the Farmers’ Protests – the agendas such as the European Green Deal, the plans to reform the EU Budget and the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), the commitment to the implementation of European Migration and Asylum Pact, and several others. This kind of hesitation is not a good omen, when the EU is to embark on the debate on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2027 – 2034. And it suggests that the new mandate will be equally about setting new horizon, as also about protecting the progress and paths that have already been agreed upon. It will take coordination, strategy and skillfulness to make sure that building on the proud Progressive legacy will be a matter of having strength and credentials, and not a factor that will make the social democratic parties perpetually find themselves in a defense.

I.B The strategic positioning of social democracy in Europe

The preoccupation with the state and future of social democracy has been at the core of the FEPS work, of which a prominent example is the Next Left Research Programme. It was established in the aftermath of the European Elections 2009 (in cooperation with the Karl Renner Institut) and has become the most prolific initiative of that kind, uniting diverse activities under its umbrella and currently being a multi-layered construction, involving Focus Group delivering annually original research and engaging in national debates, High-Level Conversation (with leading academics) that looks at the long term challenged, the Lectures delivered in the European Parliament by top academics and addressed at key political stakeholders, the books featuring collective volumes and country case studies, the Progressive Pollsters Network, the Progressive Historians Network and the Oxford Symposium (which in 2024 celebrated its 10th edition). These are just keywords that help illustrate both the analytical and creative capacity of FEPS and the outreach and impact. They are, therefore, strong credentials that allow FEPS to play a key role in the new mandate, facilitating a critical assessment of the strategic positioning of social democracy and helping reinforce the European Progressive Movement. While attention must be paid to ensuring primacy of progressive politics over all the issues enlisted above, this is the time that the social democrats will also need to embark on a serious reflection on how to renew themselves and get ready to persevere in these complex years, collect new ideas and energies, and build a chance to win in 2029.

To that end, the analyses of the 2024 European Elections underline that, overall, the Social Democrats performed as it had been predicted. But unlike in 2019, they did not manage to exceed expectations. Despite the intense campaign headed by Nicolas Schmit, who, as a Top Candidate, was also a symbolic choice for the EU of quality employment and social progress for all, the Party came out second and roughly maintained the number of MEPs. That happened amid the gains noted by the EPP, which seem to have overcome some aspects of the internal crisis, and amid losses noted especially by the Greens and also by the Liberals. The results of the social democrats were considered victorious in only two member states, and there have been strong regional disparities among the performance of the sister parties – whereby, especially in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, the results were commented as not only disappointing but vastly worrying. Despite the fact that following the public opinion surveys, the topic of the “cost of living crisis” was the most important issue in the opinion of the voters, it did not get the most attention. The rise of right-wing extremists and radicals, as well as the fact that two new European Parliament groups were created on the right, almost monopolized the focus. Altogether this came down to a fragmented political scene on the EU level, on which, despite the hopes, there had been no real attempt at rebalance inside of the new European Commission – which will reflect more the composition of the Council than it does the outcomes of the elections in June 2024. The S&D family will be left with just a handful of Commissioners and 1 so-called “top job” - namely the President of the European Council.

The European Parliament elections are still considered second-order elections. Even if the turnout was the highest in three decades, it still hasn't risen much above 50%. But still, they point out a number of challenges that the progressive family will have to address. First of all, there is a question of what the new, future-oriented and voters-mobilizing project of social democrats should incorporate. On one hand, this calls for a discussion on the translation that the core values and traditional principles of the movement should have in contemporary times (as the one that took place 15 years ago in the context of the drafting of the PES Fundamental Programme). As also for an in-depth about what they mean when responding to different aspects of the poly-crisis (post-COVID, the impact of the war in Ukraine, the impact of climate change, the cost of living and housing crisis etc.), to demographic challenges (with an aging population and growing waves of migration) and to changing expectations within the population (when it comes to empowerment, aspirations and opportunities, security). There is a need for a new, coherent and distinctively progressive project that can serve as a guideline not only now but also beyond 2029. On the other hand, it also requires re-imagining an agenda that could be a broader denominator – re-powering social democrats as the central stakeholders in a broad movement formula that would unite other political, trade union and civil society forces into a coalition able to enact the needed change. Both of these – reflection on values and how to open up are key to helping European social democrats remain aspirational and forward-looking while also being able to

find sources of political influence also outside of the brackets of the current, vulnerable “grand, pro-European coalition”.

Secondly, following the last elections, there is also a clear gap in the capacity of the sister parties across the EU. The results point to the diversity in the strength between West and East, as in the CEE region, several among the historical parties (CSSD / SocDem) and the reformed ones, which led their countries’ EU’ accession, have been struggling to persevere (with MSZP, to give an example left with no MEP and BSP reaching the new electoral low). This is a generalization, of course, because if to zoom in on the West, there are also several parties that had lost – with the most prominent example among them being the SPD. These are worrying signals, which, however, should be mentioned with attention to the other results from within the same 2024 elections. It has been clear that it is possible for the centre-left parties that are described as *collapsed* to bounce back. And solid proof of that are the results of PASOK and PS France. What it means is that the time for reflection and action is now, as long as the strategy forward abides by a reasonable and attainable set of criteria for renewal.

This starts with the realisation that societies have evolved and hence the contemporary patterns of political participation are very dissimilar to the ones from a decade or two ago. This means that social democrats have to re-envisage the organization that they want to be to abide by the principles of inclusiveness and representativeness, as also to be the vehicle of change by involving and promoting citizens, whose voices may not have been fully heard by now. It is imperative to do better and become an example in mainstreaming equality, empowering through access to people of diverse genders, generations, origins, and professions. That diversity must translate into equal electoral opportunities and chances to make part of leadership, and must be proof as well, that social democrats are aware and ready to open up and reform by acting on citizens’ concerns, demands and aspirations. That commitment must be visible from the local, European, and international levels of politics.

Furthermore, the reorganization would have to be accompanied by a change in the way the progressives build their narrative and communicate. The studies show that in the era dominated by social media, one has to learn a lot about the character of the interactions – which are much less based on premises that the parties broadcast and expect potential voters to listen, and much more on the idea of creating impulses for active engagement. This should not mean abandoning the traditional personal contacts, but it does require an expansion of a toolbox. That is in particular, if social democracy wishes to reach out to younger voters and convince them to either adhere or use the party-related spaces for activism.

These are some elements that could be important ingredients of the new strategy that will allow social democrats to regain the ground, increase influence and impact, and to that end return back to power position. Keeping a focus on these mid-term and long-term challenges is what FEPS plans to insist on, knowing that the legislative period 2024 – 2029 will be very demanding and often frustrating – with social democrats trying to preserve their place in the grand pro-European alliance, boosting the meaning and means to deliver on the portfolios they have been entrusted with inside of the EP and the Commission, and continuing to push for the pledges they had placed in the election manifesto. So while the unshaken sense of responsibility for the European project will be a key motivation to carry on in an unfavorable context, securing strategic advantages by cooperating and using the assets to build the potential for in the future will offer a much-needed motivating prospect for sure.

I.C The vision for a stronger, more autonomous, and more capable Union

The shift in the progressive paradigm and the new opening

So this is becoming new momentum, especially when the Progressives – as the proponents of the European integration process – should come forward with a counter-narrative to the one that the Conservatives and others are trying to forge as the only sensible one. The new vision needs to articulate a project that is focused on transforming Europe to be stronger, more autonomous, and more capable. It has to start by imagining the EU as an inspiring and future-oriented community, representing a unique developmental model and acting internally and externally with unshaken integrity. In other words, it is about envisaging the EU that commands the power to co-define the context in which it exists and can choose its path forward in a more sovereign manner. This requires shifting the paradigm and de-emphasizing the inside-out type of deliberations, often prompting a defensive reasoning focused predominantly on *reacting*. That approach is more and more typical for the right wing. Instead, the more opportune way forward is to start conceptualizing the new EU as an architect and stakeholder of the emerging new global order. That is a much more appropriate angle, which allows operating on multiple levels of governance and ensures that the European Union anticipates the next stage of globalisation.

This shift requires recognising several dynamics. First, the lockdowns, the impact of the war in Ukraine, and the global supply chain crisis all exposed the vulnerability of the EU. Despite the quick mobilisation of resources and effective search for alternatives, it has been clear that the functioning of its economy, the future of its industrial strategy, and the ability to uphold the existing transformative agendas depend vastly on external factors (if considered especially i.e. the crucial import of so-called critical raw materials). So, while the European Union has been seeking to pursue the agenda of European

Strategic Autonomy and of sustainability (i.e. through projects like Re-Power EU, Zero-Net or Circular Economy), they still do not seem to offer sufficient protection against shock and disruptions. That is, unless there is an overall reform leading to a new global order based on the idea of new multilateralism and, consequently, a new set of rules for global governance. The EU has a vital interest in pursuing these two simultaneously, preventing a situation of being 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 transatlantic security cooperation between North-America, Great Britain and the EU - 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 and may prove fragile already in autumn 2024, when the new Presidential elections take place in the US. Especially since the BRICS countries seen together continue to rise in their influence.

Secondly, the change in the strategic approach is not about externalising the problems, but internalising the global perspective. The European Economic Community was founded in the 1950s as a peace project and the tools the EU has today, alongside the understanding it has about its common foreign and security policy, reflect that idea. Nevertheless, there are two reasons why rethinking is necessary. Primarily, the mission of ensuring, promoting, and safeguarding peace needs to apply to the context in which there is a war at the EU's doorstep, there is an escalation of the conflict in the Middle East, which makes the EU Summit focus more and more on the *measures for the economy in the times of war* alongside the plan to advance with building a Defense Union. Even if the latter is a process that goes hand in hand with implementing the decision to increase the coordination between the EU and NATO, it still risks being pursued with a narrow understanding of security and *defense* as armament. And this, in itself is already at the start, the point where there is a clear divergence of views among the Member States, because of their respective traditions and economic interests (when defining i.e. the rules for procurement). There, again, the Progressive proposal for a narrative shift has to imprint an expanded definition of foreign policy (including here feminist foreign policy), security as safety (which encompasses the socio-economic, climate and demography-related questions, but also commitments to aid and development policies) and framings of the strategic partnerships (including within the neighborhood policies and the relations with the so-called “Global South”). Furthermore, there is a point to be made that such a prolific approach will require further integration on subsequent policy areas and overcoming the disunity that started emerging inside the EU (as manifested by some of the Member States) especially when it comes to the relations with Russia.

This proposal for this narrative shift towards a progressive vision of a viable, more autonomous and capable Union as a way forward and a way out of the defensive corner, as also an alternative to what the right wing has been offering so far, has been something that FEPS intends to pursue. And this is

also why the geopolitical questions are encompassed within the first of its three annual priorities, indicating the direction it wants to pursue as an organisation in the next months and years.

To that end, throughout the last two years, FEPS together with Members has been working on its credentials in this dimension, having conducted several prominent projects. To name just a few, under the leadership of our President Maria Joao Rodrigues, FEPS has set up a Working Group devoted to equipping Europe with *a foresight* on potential future global developments, as also on articulating proposals for the reform of the UN system (see the book “*A New Global Deal. Reforming the EU Governance*”). Additionally, FEPS has been very active as the UN ECOSOC consultative member, has been a partner in the UN Summit of the Future in 2024 and of the Second UN Summit for Social Development in 2025 (with its series of high-level conferences “United for...”). What is more, in partnership with Members as also with the PES (Party of European Socialists), SI (Socialist International) and PA (Progressive Alliance), it set up a pioneering work within the *Feminist Foreign Policy Progressive Voices Collective*. Last but not least, it also worked with the S&D Group on the question of European Trade Agreements, publishing additionally a Handbook on the matter (“*Making Trade Work for prosperity, people and planet*”).

The progressive multilayered governance approach and a new development model

While the proposed change in the approach argues for taking the global angle first for all the reasons enumerated above, the success of that shift depends on the coherence of action across the governing levels. This is also why an integral strategy should start from the geopolitical reasoning and how to ensure that the EU is a global powerhouse, but it should reflect the understanding that the claim to the right to be one comes from the uniqueness of the European developmental model and the commitment to indispensable, fundamental principles (such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights). These two aspects are, therefore, the complementary pillars and, respectively, priorities 2 and 3 within the FEPS Framework Activity Programme 2025.

Consequently, the labeling of the *European developmental model* is chosen deliberately, as there is a need indeed to pursue an ambitious vision of the European Union that is willing, capable, and prepared to extend itself – politically, economically, and geographically. Thinking in an expansionary manner is about daring to imagine a Union that is grander, having reformed itself and having ensured means to succeed in the very much overdue enlargement process. The promise to the Western Balkans had already been made over two decades ago (if to count only from the articulation of the Thessaloniki Declaration) and recently has been picked on by the EU in the face of geopolitical necessities. But the pledges that had been made to these countries, as also more recently to Ukraine and Moldova – must be, as Olaf Scholz said while explaining the concept of *Zeitenwende* and holding his historical Lecture

in Prague in 2022, delivered upon. This requires action that will frame the European economic strategy of the next years in a way in which the EU can assist these countries with rebuilding, shouldering the needed adjustments and once they join, ensuring that the model guarantees further growth, wealth and prosperity for all.

In that sense, there is a need to recall that while it was peace and shared prosperity that laid fundamentals for European Integration, today the EU must think about its economic model in a more visionary way as well. On one hand, it means that the time is up for the ever-lasting debates in regard to the essential economic reforms and change of the fiscal rules. FEPS together with Members have been arguing for these also for years and have provided a substantial amount of sound arguments and proposals to back these up. The next mandate they must be implemented, alongside the completion of the Single Market (to which issue the recent report of Enrico Letta was a particularly insightful document) and Capital Markets Union (CMU). These all are well-defined steps that FEPS has been working on as well (with many relevant publications available to showcase it), and it is clear that they are needed for unleashing the EU's economic and monetary potential. This is why the role of the Executive Commission Vice President in charge of the Competitive transition, among the others, will be so pivotal. On the other hand, there is a need to go further and for that the upcoming MFF (Multiannual Financial Framework) debate is crucial. The EU needs a new approach which consistently pursues the mutual reinforcement of the economy and fulfillment of the vision of creating a real Social Europe. The legacy of the social summits and the recent Declaration from La Hulpe serve here as very important guidelines enlisting the key commitments from the side of the EU and the member states, even more relevant as the reassurance for the citizens that this time around the EU will not go austere in the crisis and will do utmost to uphold the promise of guaranteeing a better, fairer future for all.

With these existing guiding documents, there is, therefore, a great basis for the departure point for the new mandate – which, however, should be even more ambitious. This is the time for the stakeholders not only to reach the long overdue, pending agreements – but to start seriously debating the avenues for medium and long-term prospects. Unlike at the beginning of the century, when success in politics seems to have been mostly determined by the promptness of delivery and fitting in within a short media cycle, amid poly-crisis there has been clear indication that citizens require from the politicians more foresight and hence stretching the borders of their imagination. In the context of Social Europe, this means a necessity to coin an answer that will encapsulate understanding of the triple transition (digital, green and demographic) and imagining the society that will emerge subsequently. This suggests a more refined approach, especially on the side of the progressives, when it comes to envisaging what kind of a labor market there will be and how, especially amid the circumstances of the digital type of capitalism, to frame the rules to make digitalisation beneficial for

all the people and incapable of generating circumstances of abuse (when it comes to specific groups, such as platform workers, or when it comes to the emerging culture of work by guaranteeing i.e. the right to disconnect). This, along with other aspects of the changing professional lives, indicates that this is high time for a new working time directive (alongside many other regulations), as also the time to re-fill the concept of empowerment and “well-being” at work with new content (that pays attention to decent working conditions, equal pay for equal work, democratisation at workplace and right to equal representation in boards, but also to issues connected with mental health and work-life balance). FEPS has been certainly providing much food for thought across these areas and the planning for the next year is to reinforce it with expansion – especially in the Thematic Fields of Social Europe, Finance and Economy, Digital Programme, as also Climate and Environment, and Gender Equality.

But while the deliberation on the future of the world of work, as also on the future of the European production and consumption model, are at the core, they would not be complete if not the regard for the remaining aspects of the EPSR and the entire public sector. The COVID-19 pandemic was a grand reminder of how crucial it is, prompting a conversation about the role of the state(s) and the function of the Social Contract in modern times. The concern about the state of rights, as well as the mutual responsibilities was also the debate that echoed in the Conference on the Future of Europe, and has been under the surface when assessing people’s disenchantment and disbelief in better prospects for the future. As such it certainly requires being addressed in the next five years with the double lens. First, there is a question on the application of the subsidiarity principle and the areas in which further integration would clearly be required. An example of that is the Health Union, where the EU so far does not have enough prerogatives, but also perhaps some aspects of the R&D and educational policies, which again remain very strongly in the realm of the member states policies. And yet another one is the Housing Policy, whereby there are many calling for a new Fund – which would however require the EU to expand its prerogatives also. The new Commissioner, who will have housing as a part of the portfolio, will be from a progressive family and hence he will have a great responsibility to turn these proposals into the strategy. The Union would have to have then necessary instruments enabling it to obtain the necessary data on issues such as homelessness to target the investments, as also frame a mechanism allowing the scrutiny and periodical assessments of the progress (possibly under the supervision of one of the Commissioners). These are just some of the takeaways from the research and policy studies conducted by FEPS together with Sister Organisations, Partners and Members, all of which should be continued.

Secondly, there is a question of new standards and here again, the EU would need to invest in a new approach and potentially new directive on services (including here the services of general interests and the social services), as the one that was adopted is almost two decades old – mirroring the

different understanding of potential consequences of extended liberalization. Initiating, conducting, and concluding such a debate would be possibly the best way to show that the demands for more intergenerational solidarity can be implemented on the EU level, as well as to address the concerns raised in regards to inequitable division of labour i.e. among parents and caretakers. On the latter, the FEPS – FES Care Atlas can be of inspiration as a diligent mapping of problems and catalogue of viable, implementable solutions.

The democratic legitimacy and responsibility

The proposed paradigm shift emphasising the need to pursue the ideal of a stronger, more autonomous, and more capable Union from a different angle – has been described to showcase the complementarity of thinking about the future of Europe within the geopolitical context and vis-à-vis the developmental model it should aspire to represent. But across all these pages, it was underlined that a set of new agreements is needed to succeed in implementing such a vision. Internationally, this is co-dependent on the ability to forge a new global deal underpinned by the philosophy of multilateralism. Within the EU internal context, it depends on the capacity to re-think the Union and transform it into a project that anticipates the time, being a symbol of modernity, leadership in standards and delivering, when it comes to the promise of prosperity and social progress for all. But these bold ideas and the ambitious policies need to reflect an understanding that the EU itself needs to be considered as a social deal – amongst states, regions, populations and individuals. Regardless of the reforms and resources, it will not happen by default – unless there is a serious investment in democratising the EU.

If to revisit the campaign ahead of the referendum on what is colloquially labelled as Brexit, as also if to dive in the responses to the surveys (including the ones by the Eurobarometer) - what comes forward as the criticism is the sense of disempowerment of the citizens, feeling bypassed or even excluded from co-deciding about the policies and the future of the Union. There are a handful of explanations to this state of affairs, starting from the tendency exhibited by many leaders to *blame Brussels* for unpopular decisions – and followed by the feeling that when the EU delivers, it does so too late and that when the initiatives come back in the format of legislation, they hardly resemble what the initial idea. These aspects have, however, been changing, predominantly because of the polycrisis – within which, especially, amid the pandemics there was a shift. The citizens expected the EU to find solutions (especially in terms of finding ways to rebuild a common immunity system), as the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) indicated, had hopes for it to deliver more and quicker in the future. There has been a gradual change in the sense of the European policies becoming more and more domestic, and hence also the citizens more aware of the importance of what the EU does. This understanding has been further forged thanks to the great political investment of the progressive

leaders, who whenever in a position of Prime Ministers tried to connect the internal and European policies, ensure convergence of actions and engage in additional bilateral conversations with their peers on the questions in regards of the future of Europe. The example here includes i.e. actions by Pedro Sánchez, Antonio Costa, and Sanna Marin – to name a few.

What is more, the EU has shown a capacity to act in the name of democracy and fundamental values. The first example was the Commissioner Helena Dalli's decision to withhold the funds from the local communities that shamefully called themselves "LGBTQI+ free zones", the other was the application of the conditionality mechanism in relation to Poland and Hungary in the context of the Next generation EU. It was a breakthrough, as for many years it would have seemed that the Union was capable of promoting the principles on which it was established, building also on the overall consensus as per what they have meant and the commitment to preserve them (when fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria). But, once the members started challenging these rules and authoritarian tendencies started growing in force, subsequently entering the governments and questioning i.e. the rule of law principles, it seemed that the EU wasn't equipped with the tools to prevent the deterioration and stand in defense of that part of *acquis communautaire*. Article 7 has proved very difficult to enact, and the European Court of Justice rulings are not infrequently disregarded (despite the financial consequences).

Clearly, in the next 5 years, the European Union will have to do much more. It will need to ensure more tools to enable itself to act when democracy is threatened. With the changing political landscape and the radical forces growing in strength, it will have a particular responsibility to defend values, principles and along that line the rule of law. Its commitment and capacity to act stands for its internal and external credibility, as well what answers to the calls of those populations of which states find themselves in perilous situations and of whose individuals feel their rights undermined. The Union must be able to prevent further backlash and 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, of people of all generations and origins. But while the focus on the past years has been on how to *Defend Democracy*, the next period should see a similarly strong commitment to promoting and innovating when it comes to representative, deliberative and participatory democracy.

That is part of what the EU must keep in focus while undertaking a profound institutional reform. It is evident, also building on the experiences with the enlargement of 2004 especially, the fiasco of the so-called Constitutional Treaty and the subsequent Plan-D, that moving towards the enlargement without revisiting the Lisbon Treaty would be a colossal mistake. The EU Treaties do not provide the operational rules for what will be the Community of 30 plus Members at this stage, neither when it comes to the

ways the decisions are taken, not when it comes to defining the process of composing and constituting of the European institutions *sensu largo*. But forging a new compromise in the current political context will be a complex exercise, as there may be a risk of seeing attempts by the right-wing radical and authoritarian forces to argue to restrict and retrench the EU powers in the name of falsely understood national sovereignty. This can become a serious obstacle, one that needs to be counteracted – and Progressives being both proponents of the integration and of enlargement will be in a situation in which, even if they will be in a limited composition inside of the European Council, they will have to play a pivotal role as innovators and compromise brokers. The elements that can help build adequate strategy, can further be found in the FEPS publications – especially in the report delivered by the High-Level Expert Group under FEPS President Maria Joao Rodrigues on the Treaties’ reform and in the FEPS - FES literature pertaining the future of the transnational politics and parties.

But what is more, any institutional reform will have to also carry elements that would show that the EU carefully drew the lessons from the already mentioned CoFoE, as also from the European elections 2024. The change should not only focus on operational aspects and on the quality of the representative democracy but also boost the deliberative and participatory aspects of democracy in Europe. On the one hand, there is a dire need here for innovations to help unleash the potential of transnational politics (including further empowering of the transnational parties, updating the European electoral code and thinking more pragmatically how to implement the proposal for transnational lists), as also to support the European level organised civil society and to give more power to the instruments enabling citizens to engage directly. To achieve these goals, a revision of the European Citizens Initiative would be necessary, of the EU Youth Dialogue rules, of the role of the new generation Citizens Consultation and other tools will be necessary.

All these tasks enlisted here are monumental indeed and accomplishing them may take longer than one legislative period. But, 2024 -2029 is going to be a crucial mandate, within which the choice is not between *status quo* or more integration, but between accepting an erosive state of play or proposing an alternative that can see a stronger, more autonomous, and more capable *progressive* Union. Social democratic family, despite not having the same power in the Council and having to act in a very different European Parliament, is however in the position to stand tall and match with this historical challenge. And on that road, FEPS with its past, ongoing, and planned work will certainly be in a position to keep providing adequate supportive contributions.

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 30th 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. The ambition of FEPS is to become the leading institute when it comes to progressive thinking about the future of the EU. The capacity to contribute to a progressive Commission Work Programme has been proven several times.

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 in the past 5 years – 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 2025 in order to: set the long-term priorities for the organisation; showcase the consequence, when it comes to upholding the initiatives in which it is renowned and has established credentials, while in parallel exhibit the capacity to perpetually innovate and grow; 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 2025 will be the fourth 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 2025, to forge more cooperation among the members and hence after enhance the output in the spirit of “less is more”.

II | MISSION HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2025: TO BE INSPIRING, INSTRUCTIVE, AND IMPACTFUL

The 2024 European Parliament elections catalysed substantial changes on our continent. It is not only the question of the changing composition of the respective EU institutions, but also the time in which a new set of compromises need to be forged about both the general direction and the particular short, medium, and long-term priorities. In 2024 -2025, because of the described earlier shifts on the political map of Europe, it is to be expected that the negotiations will continue beyond the consolidation of the European Commission. What is more, with the centre-right being open to considering an alliance with some among the radical right (especially when it comes to voting together on specific issues) and all the splits and mergers that are already now taking place on that side of the political stage, it is to be anticipated that some critical issues may become hostages of tensed and possibly unproductive debates. Within such a context, and knowing that the Progressive family may have somewhat more limited powers and hereafter not unlimited resources, it is important to align carefully choosing the priorities for the 5 years to come and the deliverables for the next 12 months. Consequently, following the PES Berlin and Malaga Declarations, as also the PES Manifesto adopted in Rome in 2024, alongside the strategic documents of the S&D and PES in CoR, and building on its own research and reflection, FEPS is determined to consolidate and deliver within 3 strategically relevant dimensions that will contribute in strive for:

1) For a Stronger and Strategically Autonomous Europe

Boosting the power and capacity of the European Union to act as an integrated Community that is committed to delivering on the promise of peace, sustainable development and a new multilateral global deal

2) For a Recovered, Resilient and Transformative Europe

Paving the way to a new European development model by equipping it with policy instruments to fight inequalities and ensure social progress for all through its economic, fiscal, labour, social, gender, green and digital policies

3) For a Democratic and Enlarged Europe

Strengthening the Political Union through adequate institutional reforms and means, so that it can defend and promote democracy, as also empower and engage citizens in the new steps of the deliberations about the Future of Europe.

II A. For a Stronger and Strategically Autonomous Europe

Boosting the power and capacity of the European Union to act as an integrated Community that is committed to delivering on the promise of peace, sustainable development and a new multilateral global deal

The noted polarisation and fragmentation of the European political scene means that three factors will shape the circumstances of decision-making. First, there will be different dynamics inside the European Council and, hence, the European Commission. Consequently, keeping the focus on an open and globally strong Europe, as also ensuring its defining role within the new global governance system, will be a laborious political mission. Secondly, there will be external challenges that the EU will have to face, especially following the US elections. In the past legislative period, following the election of President Biden, the EU chose a very strong transatlantic orientation. But it wasn't the only focus; looking at the relations it tried to attend to i.e. within the EU-CELAC Summit in 2023, the discussion on need for new Chapter of the relations between the EU and African Union, as also the attempts to close new trade agreements. There is a clear need for a new, strategic synthesis of these. Thirdly, the data collected by scholars in the past legislative period show that the members of the progressive family tend to disagree, not about principles, but about the direction and implementation of the specific aspects of the broadly understood CFSP policies. With all these aspects taken into consideration, FEPS by making the topic ***For A Stronger and Strategically Autonomous Europe*** a top priority, can be in the next mandate a space for the development of the new bold ideas of a debate among divergently thinking stakeholders and an organization with responsibility to disseminate the proposals to create momentum (and hence after broader alliance).

The issues that should be considered here are connected to the 10 (plus Training) Thematic Fields. Within **Europe in the World**, the efforts should focus on following up on the Un Summin on the Future 2023 – and preparing for the UN Second World Summit for Social Development in 2025. The prior focus here should lay on discussing the role that the EU should play – both politically (within the new governance structures) and also in terms of ensuring its policy (as a *competitive, values-driven, prosperous developmental model*). This is where the process of the United for... conferences will prove very useful as an established brand and vehicle of cooperation among many FEPS Foundations.

However, these efforts should also go hand-in-hand with the focus on determining the rules for international involvement. This is what connects especially with the work being done within the fields of **Economy and finance** (with a focus here on a coherent approach to the WTO system and the trade

agreements); the field of **Migration** (where not permitting abandonment and monitoring progress with the EU Migration and Asylum Pact will be crucial), as also the **Gender Equality** (where the work within the FEPS and partners Feminist Foreign Policy Progressive Voices Collective, alongside providing strong input for the CSW 2025 will be of crucial importance).

To that end, while the European Union has an ambition and sense of responsibility when it comes to redefining the Global New Deal - it also has to redefine the role it wants to play on the continent itself and the tools that it will be using for it. The priority here is the future of enlargement, along with the moral obligation that the EU has for the future and rebuilding of Ukraine. FEPS has a track record of work on this topic with several member foundations under the direct lead of Secretary-General László Andor. This initiative has to continue, expanding and connecting strongly also between the **Europe in the World** thematic field and across the others: **Economy and Finance, Political Europe, as also Future of Social Democracy and Training** (within the aspect of the last two, preparing paths to strengthening the potential of the progressives in Ukraine). Attention will have to be paid also to how the evolved EU cooperates with the neighbours, among them being now also UK – which hopefully will see a Labour government after the summer. Also on that, FEPS, unlike any other European foundation, has a strong basis and legacy of 15 years of fruitful cooperation with members there to continue building on.

This is also linked with the necessity to further pursue initiatives such as Friends of Western Balkans from within Political Europe, which sees increased work aimed at bringing more coherence and working towards a program that would unite the power and means of FEPS and partners further. The enlargement and the reform of the union are going to be at the core of the geo-strategic conversation, and those points connect this first FAP 2025 priority also more coherently with the work done inside of the thematic field of **Defending and Deepening Democracy**. Taking any step forward will depend on the EU's revision of the decision-making processes (providing mechanisms that will make these democratic, effective and representative to all the current and new states), but also on winning the arguments within the public debates within the Member States. Here again, the strategies elaborated on how to win the voices of youth and how to counterbalance far right, disinformation and aggression in politics will be crucial.

II. B For a Recovered, Resilient and Transformative Europe

Paving the way to a new European development model by equipping it with policy instruments to fight inequalities and ensure social progress for all through its economic, fiscal, labour, social, gender, green and digital policies

The Progressives' objective for the next five years will clearly be double-folded. On one hand, they will focus on defending the achievements of previous cycles, many of which may continue to be questioned or even undermined. This has been the case for the European Green Deal, as also for the European Pillar of Social Rights. On the other hand, there will be a need to prevent being permanently in a defensive position. And there it will be crucial to think about the new ways of determining the benchmarks of the *EU as a development model* that delivers on the promises of welfare, prosperity and social progress for all.

To begin with, FEPS aims to continue its work on the thematic field of **Social Europe**, which in the past five years offered many important outputs that influenced the debates and saw FEPS representatives intervening in the debate of the highest importance and level. A relevant tool here has been the **Recovery Watch**, which saw a series of publications and should be the basis of evaluating the Next Generation EU. Although it may seem that the pandemic is already a history, the impacts of it – especially when it comes to inequalities persist. And there is also an important link that needs to be made between the **Social Europe** and **Economy and Finance** thematic fields. The coming years are the ones that will see the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework and there will be a potential rebooting of the *frugalism* in Europe. The work done by FEPS and its partners to show both the ways the budget should be constructed and the ways to obtain its own resources, as also the smart, strategic and effective way the investments should be made, is an important asset and should further be developed rising FEPS profile here as a strong competence center.

The challenge to prevent backlash and define progress will also correlate to the ability to manage and pave the trajectories of the triple transition when it comes to fighting climate change and promoting sustainability when it comes to advancing with Digital Union, and when it comes to anticipating politically the demographic change. This work strongly connects the thematic fields of **Social Europe**, **Climate and Environment**, **Digital Economy and Society**, and **Gender Equality**. What brings them together is the fact that the projects and initiatives conducted by FEPS and the partners on these fields, all aim at answering from diverse angles such questions as: how to fight inequalities and exclusions? How to define rights and responsibilities, and hence, after the means and scope for the public policies? How can Europe become again the competitive economic powerhouse in the new era and continue doing so with social cohesion in mind? How to imagine the quality jobs of the future and the ways to regulate them? How to provide adequate social protection? And finally, what do with those areas – where the EU doesn't yet have competencies? Which of them are better served on the local level with attention to the subsidiarity principle, and which should become part of the EU scope of action?

To that end, within the next five years, there will be much that the progressive family can rely on when it comes to the work done already (as illustrated also in the numerous publications, policy briefs and policy studies) and the initiatives already planned. FEPS intends to continue working on the future of industrial policy, the care economy and new potential agreements on public services (including the services of general interest), the Health Union and the housing policies, democracy at the workplace and several others - to name just a few here as prominent examples. But there is every intention also to innovate and expand, an example of which is the ambition to work within **Social Europe** on demographic developments. There will also be consideration how FEPS can build on its previous projects, to prepare ahead the contribution to the debate on several new EU agendas – i.e. following the initiative Builders of Progress – feed into the deliberation on the EU Youth Strategy (beyond the current one expiring in 2027), or following the work within Gender Equality – offer space for reflection on priorities and monitoring of progress of The New EU Gender Equality Strategy (beyond 2025).

II. C For a Democratic and Enlarged Europe

Strengthening the Political Union through adequate institutional reforms and means, so that it can defend and promote democracy, as also empower and engage citizens in the new steps of the deliberations about the Future of Europe.

The evaluation of the legislative period 2019 -2024, as also of the outcomes of the recent elections (both the European, as also national, regional and local ones), point to the fragility of democracy. It has been challenged in an unprecedented manner. On the one hand, Member States of the EU have deviated from the path of democracy towards authoritarianism. This exposed the fact that the EU Treaties had been written with the principal idea that all adhering to the community would respect democracy and the rule of law, and hence, the EU has a very small toolbox when it comes to being able to act. On the other hand, it has been well noted that there is a transversal feeling of disempowerment among the citizens. This is one, among many other reasons, for which they choose to vote for radical, protest and extreme parties. This trend will not change, even if the parties they support are seasonal ones and several among them disappear as quickly as they emerge. This will not make the voters return by default. Finally, drawing also from the evaluation of the European Elections, the rise in turnout was very meager – despite the europeanisation of the respective national public spheres, despite the previous mandate being marked by the CoFoE and despite the growing recognition for the EU as an entity that has delivered. Henceforth, the challenge for the EU to address democratic deficit in the next mandate is a monumental one indeed.

The FEPS approach is to see the third priority as a transversal one as well, hence there is an ambition for the next year in particular – to complete the audit process of the **Defending and Deepening**

Democracy, finding ways to better craft the strategic agenda for the thematic field and also to define the scope in a way that is distinctive to social democracy. Hence also, there is a need to forge better connections and pursue initiatives that also respond to the new threads – an example of which is a potential project that could emerge on the canvas of this **Digital Economy and Society**, dealing with the challenges of digital democracy.

Furthermore, the transversal approach also means that the commitment to democracy has to be central to institutional reform and accession negotiations. This connects with the thematic field of the **Political Union**, where the work done by FEPS in cooperation with members on enlargement, treaty reform, and the transnational dimension of European politics should be expanded. Taking into account the political climate in Europe, as also the gains that the right-wing radical parties noted, it is high time to find ways for the progressive to work out the ways out of the traditional disagreements in regards to *how federal the EU should be*. This requires space for debate, as well as the supporting materials – which FEPS has and will continue producing.

When it comes to institutional reform, the decisions on eliminating or partially eliminating unanimity, the ratification of enlargement, and the revision of the rules in regard to the European Citizens' Initiative and the Citizens' Panels are not mechanics. They are profound political choices that will define the strength and legitimacy of the Union internally and externally. While FEPS with partners will pursue and cohere better diverse dimensions, one important interlink will be made to add another competitive advantage. It will translate the new transversal, distinctive approach to the question of democracy more prominently into tools and manuals for civic education with the **FEPS Training Strategy** (Programme).

Last but not least, this third priority is, like the other two, prolific one, not only in terms of contents, but also in terms of engagement with potential partners. FEPS can proudly mention now several projects within which the alliance behind, consisted of FEPS Members and sister organizations, but also important trade unions, civil society representatives, women and feminist movements, youth, LGBTQI+ and senior groups, and many others. Having in mind all the objectives that this FAP 2025 is articulating, it is of crucial relevance that the efforts continue being invested in strengthening the existing and seeking, whenever appropriate, further partnership based on common values and goals. The togetherness can shield against the erosion and divisions within contemporary European societies.

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 2025 are:

1. **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 gradual integration of Ukraine
2. **MIGRATION** – informing and sustaining a fair debate on asylum and migration, with a particular focus on monitoring the implementation of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum and fostering adequate integration policies, defining the features of an efficient and humane management of migration and developing fair and balanced relations with the countries of origin and transit; whilst analysing the nexus between demographic changes in Europe and migration dynamics
3. **SOCIAL EUROPE** – ensuring the relevance and implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in the new legislature, expanding social objectives and EU integration in the field of health and wellbeing, deepening the debate on decent work alongside promotion of a new approach to public services and housing policies, while fighting new poverties and anticipating on demographic change.
4. **ECONOMY AND FINANCE** – designing a resilient and sustainable economic development model, with a goal to design policy proposals towards a job-rich industrial policy, European fiscal capacity and fair taxation to support the innovative, fair and productive economy, and scaling up of economic democracy.
5. **CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT** – addressing the climate emergency and supporting the implementation of the European Green Deal, with a commitment to search for further equitable ways to reach ambitious climate and environmental goals globally, create new clean jobs and mainstream climate and ecological objectives in European policies.
6. **DIGITAL ECONOMY AND SOCIETY** – – assessing the effects of accelerated digital transformation for European societies and economies, exploring how AI impacts workers, how we keep our democracy healthy in times of social media and how Europe can create its digital

model for an autonomous, progressive path towards technological development that supports public services.

7. **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
8. **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
9. **DEFENDING AND DEEPENING DEMOCRACY** – analysing the main threats to democracy (far right politics, authoritarian tendencies, nationalism) inside but also outside the European Union – in order to find ways to foster participatory and representative democracy, with a specific focus on young people.
10. **FUTURE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY** – evaluating the positioning of the progressive forces across the levels of governance, with a focus on their programmatic and strategic dilemmas, organisational difficulties and electoral appeal, governing capacities as well as abilities to remain constructive opposition and to bounce back from the crises.

III. B FEPS training – moving towards a Training Programme

In January 2022 FEPS Bureau endorsed the FEPS Training Strategy (TS), following which moment it has been in the phase of implementation that saw close to 100% of accomplishment of the initial deliverables. The TS continues to evolve around 3 pillars, focused on: knowledge, skills and capacity building respectively. While the Members responded enthusiastically and especially in 2024 there has been a high demand to work together, FEPS believes that in order to ensure the coherence of multiple instruments and financial sustainability, the TS should be transformed into a *FEPS Programme*. Building on the existing elements, it will include

FEPS Open Progressive University

FEPS Open Progressive University (OPU) is a new and pioneering 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 23rd 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 2025, 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 deliver a special programme for students about and from Ukraine.

FEPS Annual Autumn Academy | Brussels, Belgium | September / October 2025

Following the 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, especially taking into account the large engagement of the sister organisations, the community of alumni and the spontaneous demands from former and potential participants to continue. FEPS is planning to ensure that whilst the design of the programme will evolve, 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 hosting the launch of the FEPS Primers, and as an innovation – it will also include one item open to the broader public, namely the Sir Antony Barnes Atkinson Lecture.

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. At the moment of drafting, the 3rd cycle is about to start 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 FEPS work on the state of social democracy in V4, as also the new project on the state of social democracy in Lithuania, Latvia and Eastonia.

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 2025, FEPS published the outcomes of the 8th cycles (6 policy papers) and finalised the recruitment of the 9th cycle, launching it in July 2024 and intending to continue in 2025.

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, thanks to the support of the FMS and Karl Renner Institut. It is created through a sequence of Training for Trainers 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. Importantly, in order to bring uniformity to the quality of trainings provided by FEPS, only the Members of the Pool of Trainers will be entitled to offer trainings within FEPS and partners projects as of 2025.

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 Leadership Academy | Throughout the year

A new element that is foreseen as a valuable addition to the FEPS TS will be a FEPS Leadership Academy, which will provide a carefully crafted educational programme for those aspiring and those already in the key positions within the movements. The modules will include: learning about history and principles of social democracy, getting familiar with the EU policies and debates, learning relevant skills. A proposal to cooperate arrives from Maro Soares Foundation, however closer to defining the project scope an invitation for others to join will be open – as also once established, it is expected to form an integral part of the FEPS Training Programme.

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 fifteen years)** 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 2025

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 2025

The *Call to Europe* conference has become FEPS successful annual signature event. At its origin, it was designed to be a public event held in Brussels, but through 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. In 2025, FEPS hopes to hold the events of this series in Poland and Denmark.

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

FEPS Annual Sir Anthony Barnes Atkinson Lecture | 2025 | 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 now planned to be held as a part that is open to the public within the FEPS Annual Autumn Academy. After this pilot phase, the project is expected to be further fine-tuned in 2025.

The thematic field the Sir Antony Barnes Atkinson Lecture is connected with is: Training.

UNITED FOR: Annual international conference organised on the fringe of the UN General Assembly | New York | 2025

Following the agreements and the personal commitment of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres made to the FEPS delegation during the meeting on the 4th 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 ensure that FEPS, given its ECOSOC consultative status, can continue to represent a progressive voice in major international debates. Consequently, the “UN Summit for Social Development” announced for 2025 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.

11th Oxford Symposium | Oxford, UK | July 2025

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 the 11th edition, which will be taking place – hopefully – a year into the new Labour government and will be an opportunity to debate the further prospects for the EU – UK relations of the new era.

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 2020-2024, FEPS has tested a Traineeship Programme and a Visiting Fellowship Programme. They have now become a stabilised feature and, should resources allow, will continue in 2025, 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, as also the established researchers and experienced stakeholders 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 the 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 program's design a proud example of how longer-term political training can be organized with absolute respect to equal treatment and the highest labor standards as principles.

V. | FEPS COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

V.A FEPS Communications

The year 2024, defined by the EU elections and the start of a new term, significantly impacted FEPS' communication efforts and the overarching strategy. It has directed our priorities and emphasised specific key topics of significance. The wave of new members of the European Parliament and other policymakers arriving in the EU capital also represents a new opportunity for FEPS to widen its network.

In parallel, FEPS has continued implementing the Communication Strategy -adopted by the General Assembly in June 2020 - as it remains a valid compass for enhancing visual identity, reinforcing branding, introducing innovative and engaging communication tools, and expanding outreach and impact.

Strategising and planning

Ambitious strategising and consistent planning on communications serve to ensure 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 are key to efficiency and to maximising the lifespan and cross-promotion opportunities of FEPS materials.
- b) Long, mid and short-term comms plans with clear priorities are essential to being more strategic, well-prepared and organised in 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 lubricated collaboration and participation of the entire team.

(Online) events coverage & audiovisual capacity

Events continue to be essential tools for promoting the projects' outputs, introducing new conversations, and connecting diverse audiences. FEPS multimedia capacities have continued improving to create **a wide range of highly professional and user-friendly audiovisual material**.

A systematic approach to event coverage is now well-established and all the public events are recorded by default, allowing FEPS to expand both their ex-post communication and their audience by making the **content easily accessible** for those who could not attend. An attractive and well-organized audiovisual **archive** is available as well.

Online events have experienced significant changes in 2024. FEPS has moved from the traditional webinar in Zoom mirrored on YouTube to **a professional layout live-streamed on all social media platforms**. This has allowed FEPS to interact with its audience more directly, improving engagement for this type of events. This, in addition to the multi-camera livestream system introduced in previous years, creates the conditions for a large audiovisual production that is also combined with other materials such as video interviews, book teasers, trailers, event summaries and more.

In 2025, the facilities and opportunities that the FEPS HQ provide will be further explored, and new professional equipment may be acquired to cater to the specific communication needs of the respective events.

Visual identity

The FEPS communication team continues to work to strengthen the FEPS brand and enhance its attractiveness and recognisability among target audiences. While ensuring **consistency with standardised formats** for our various publications and products and, and always respecting the **graphic charter** as guiding compass, we continue to **innovate**, keeping our visual identity fresh and appealing.

While online tools are crucial, we must not forget the more traditional ones. In 2024, we have intensified our efforts to improve our visual identity across both online and offline formats. For example, we now systematically produce **flyers and posters** to promote FEPS events and publications, while we have also enhanced the presentation of our **Library** at the FEPS office and are constantly seeking new ways to ensure the visibility of our content, including **new displays** for books and publications.

FEPS branding is now more prominent both inside and outside our headquarters for physical and online events. Branded items such as cubes and roll-ups have increased our visibility, and we are considering wallpaper and pop-up walls featuring the FEPS logo for future events.

Additionally, we have created an official new **flyer** to introduce FEPS to those who may not be familiar with our organisation. We have also developed a new **online presentation** to present FEPS to external audiences, and a **video** presentation is in development to further enhance our digital presence.

Website

FEPS website, launched 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.

In line with the plan, in 2024, we **integrated the Progressive Post website** into the FEPS website, facilitating seamless connections between FEPS publications and events and the articles featured on the Progressive Post. Now users can easily find all the Progressive Post articles connected to all the different topics FEPS works on.

Additionally, we concentrated on transforming our website into a key reference point for our member foundations. We created an **intranet tailored specifically for members**, ensuring easy access to essential information. Additionally, we established a dedicated page for easy access to our logos and another one to facilitate recruitment processes.

The work in the “back office” will continue, focusing on the potential for innovations, including migrating other FEPS-owned secondary websites and strengthening the visibility of members and experts. FEPS Comms Team will also continue monitoring the impact through data analyses and try to make the best use of it to seek further improvements.

FEPS Newsletters

In 2022-2023, there was a notable shift in the approach to FEPS Newsletters, characterised by a move towards **standardisation and predictability**. Both FEPS and the Progressive Post Newsletters, which

disseminate information on new publications, articles, upcoming and past events, and other relevant activities and news, are now generally disseminated on fixed days of the week and planned weeks or even months in advance. However, it is worth noting that the content of these newsletters necessitated some degree of flexibility and adaptability.

The last year also witnessed a significant transition as we increased the number of **"thematic newsletters"**, focusing on specific priority topics. We also transitioned towards a **new newsletter platform** which offers better adaptability to mobile phone users and more customisation and design possibilities. Furthermore, we now have the capability to automatically extract subscriptions from individuals registering for events (who agree to subscribe), which has accelerated **newsletter subscription growth**. FEPS' metrics demonstrate notable success, boasting an open rate of 36.6% (compared to the 21.5% average), and a click rate of 2.9% (surpassing the 2.3% average).

FEPS on Social Media

In recent years FEPS has increased its outreach on all the different social networks where FEPS is present: LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. We tailor our content to fit each platform's specific needs, languages, and format to target the content produced by the numerous activities in which FEPS is involved to different audiences. An improved strategy and planning have allowed us to better balance the spread of our posts and increase our social presence.

LinkedIn is the social network that has experienced the most significant growth: more than a 350% increase in the last two years. This reflects well the particular effort invested in this platform; our content and followers' profiles are well-suited for it. We have recently started using LinkedIn's **special tools** and features, such as the newsletter function to distribute our Progressive Post newsletter, LinkedIn Events to promote FEPS' events ex-ante and strengthen our targeting capacity, and live streaming, which we plan to develop further in the coming year.

In **Instagram**, our efforts focused on reshaping highlights and enhancing stories, leading to a 47% increase in followers. On **Twitter**, even though thousands of progressive followers left the social network when Elon Musk took over, we have seen an 11% increase as a result of our meticulous planning, continuous work on live posting and increased use of high-quality visual material. **YouTube** has become not only a live-streaming platform but also a well-organised and appealing audiovisual archive.

FEPS Podcast – FEPS Talks

The FEPS Talks podcast—featuring dialogues between members of the FEPS team (including the Secretary-General, Directors or Policy Analysts) and prominent progressive policymakers, academics,

and civil society members—underwent an important **revamp in 2024**, enhancing every aspect from recording to branding and promotion.

Podcasts are now recorded at the FEPS office, ensuring high-quality sound and, as an exciting new feature, video recording. In addition to being available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and our website, episodes are now also accessible on YouTube in video format. Hosting speakers at our office also allows for professional photography, enabling us to create personalised banners with up-to-date images.

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.

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 EU elections have served as an opportunity to reinforce the synergies and cooperation with the progressive family partners. The regular meetings with other communication offices of the Progressive family have successfully continued. This regular collaboration allows us to exponentially grow the impact of each office's work and exchange best practices.

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 continues the mapping exercise to identify our counterparts and potential synergies launched, while the work to improve members' web pages on FEPS' website continues.

V.B FEPS publications

In the course of the last years, FEPS has consolidated a sound list of annual and cyclical publications, which are now considered established and recognised FEPS brands. The editorial process for policy briefs, policy studies and books has now been streamlined and systematised. FEPS is now a registered publisher at the Royal Library of Belgium and an increasing number of European libraries are asking to receive FEPS publications on a regular basis.

The Progressive Post

The Progressive Post is FEPS' quarterly magazine, which appears in print and online. It features articles on the EU's most relevant debates (explaining the polarised opinion on a given topic) and dossiers (including in-depth and multifaceted analyses of a theme), as well as interviews, books and movie reviews and editorials. The magazine's objective is to read and analyse the reality from a progressive perspective, offering fresh, compelling and inspiring reflections and equipping readers with an understanding of the current political, social, economic and global developments. Next to the printed and digital version in English (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, Hungarian, Italian, Spanish and more).

The Progressive Post Newsletter

The Progressive Post continues to issue a weekly newsletter, which alternatively disseminates 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 Progressive Reads (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 analyses of the campaigns and the outcomes of the parliamentary (or other important) elections within the European Union (and in exceptional cases also outside of it), alongside specific commentaries about the positioning of the progressive parties and their prospects in the electoral aftermath. The ideal EPO newsletter carries three articles. Since 2023, the sample of EPO analyses is 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 2024, FEPS published the fifth volume of its "Progressive Yearbook" (PYB), which has become a point of reference for European progressives who wish to rely on a source for interpreting events and development of the past year and detecting the elements that will characterise the new one. For this reason, in 2025, the PYB will once again be structured in a part looking at the past year, another part 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 explanations about progressive standpoint on the respective matters. FEPS can publish one or two primers per year, having by now made available and having in developments books on: the progressive potential of the EU, the EU and gender equality, EU and trade policies, EU and climate change, EU and Digitalisation and Social Europe. In 2025, there is an expectation of adding two more of those volumes to the collection that jointly can also be considered an important toolkit in raising awareness and, hence, the quality of the debate about European affairs.

FEPS Book Series

In 2022 FEPS started to work with the London Publishing Partnership and Dietz Verlag alongside ASPRA, an older partner. The objectives of this cooperation framework was on the one hand to ensure high-quality editorial products, and, on the other, that our programmes are served with reliable inputs and that all printed books (with the exception of the Progressive Yearbook) are also available on the market. Market integration contributes to quality control as well.

FEPS Policy Briefs and Policy Studies

FEPS has put at the disposal of both targeted and broader readership two series of publications, which are meant to present research outcomes and critical analyses of the pertinent contemporary issues alongside clear policy recommendations. Policy Briefs are short and fresh analyses addressed mainly to European and national decision-makers and administrators, while Policy Studies offer deeper analyses, based on research, of policy and policy processes and their impact on the EU and European societies. The two publications uphold joint visual identity, while differ in format. They have been

vastly used to promote output from FEPS projects and serve as a background for numerous events, breakfast meetings included.

Annex 1: 10 Thematic Fields

1. **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 gradual integration of Ukraine

The 2019-2024 legislative period saw decisive shifts taking place in the geopolitical context. The Russian invasion of Ukraine was a dramatic reminder that peace should never be taken for granted. The EU needs to ensure that peace agreements signed by countries in conflict should be implemented, and be further equipped to uphold its initial fundamental mission to serve as a peacekeeping and peace-building force. It is true in the context of the neighborhood but also in other world areas, such as the Middle East – whereby the situation is escalating, and so far, the attempts to reach a cease-fire to save innocent lives have failed. These developments have impeded discussions about the need for a real European Defense Union (EDU) and capacity, alongside strengthening the relations with NATO and other strategic partners. But especially the Progressives have been strong in arguing that it is peace and sustainable development and not the race for militarisation that should remain the drive.

To that end, the EU has been taking its responsibilities with utmost seriousness under the leadership of social democrats, who have held the portfolio of external relations. They have been acting tirelessly in the name of principles, and while defending and promoting the EU’s vital interests, they have been mindful that the ambition is to create a new kind of global institutional architecture that would reflect the logic of multilayered democracy, multilateralism and international solidarity. Though in the new mandate, the responsibility of the High Representative will be in the hands of another political family, progressives remain determined to continue working to reinforce the UN system to contribute to improving of global governance and to ensuring that the pledges that Europe has taken, when it comes to the SDGs, fighting climate change and Beijing +20 agenda remain on the top of the EU’s priorities.

That said, evidently, within the changing context, the EU must persevere and prosper, which will depend on the ability to fully implement the principles of the European Strategic Autonomy and internal transformation that will contribute to resilience and make the EU competitive. That is essential for the EU standing and ability to forge further strategic partnerships. There is much anticipation in regard to the outcome of the US elections, where there is now real hope for the Democrats to continue, and that would offer a possibility to develop the transatlantic partnership further. That may be the core factor in new rebalancing, taking into account the changes elsewhere, with particularly

BRICS+ block expanding economic and political outreach. With that grows their influence on global governance, trade and security agenda, which the EU – being a very different model – has to observe and act upon skillfully.

Sustaining the EU's commitment to support and rebuild Ukraine

The Russian aggression and the continuing war in Ukraine have been consequential for Europe. The EU has been unwavering and continued to support the war effort of Ukrainians, while it is clear that the majority of Europeans would prefer to combine continued support with efforts to find a negotiated end to the conflict. That gives an even stronger motivation to think long-term and understand that the outcome of the war and Ukraine's (post)war reconstruction 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 needs an alternative, socially responsible recovery and transformation model, able to restore the freedom of association and expression, strengthen the social contract, provide social security guarantees to the citizens (including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups), and respect the rights of ethnic and religious minorities; 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 that 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). These have been central topics of the FEPS project since the outbreak of the war, providing ample instructive materials and will continue in 2025.

Anticipating the World Summit on Social Development

A World Social Summit at the highest political level will allow the international community to strengthen the UN's framework for effective social development and save the 2030 Agenda from unraveling. It will also represent a step forward in building a networked and inclusive multilateralism, and help the UN system keep pace with the evolving challenges and opportunities of sustainable development. The celebration of a World Social Summit in 2025 represents a unique opportunity for inclusion and to bring back a shared vision in regard to development at the political forefront. Progressives have the opportunity to redefine the functioning and scope of global financial institutions and relaunch on SDGs target and climate justice.

There is wide consensus that today's global threats and geopolitics require a multidimensional response, including efforts to address the social side of the macro-economic equation, particularly in light of the widening socioeconomic gap, and the deteriorating conditions in which many people struggle to survive. Therefore, the Summit will be a vital opportunity for the Progressive family to

promote the founding principles of the European Union (equality, solidarity, democracy, respect for human rights, human dignity, and the rule of law), but also to find ways to strengthen those values and align policy proposals (financial assistance, fair tax systems, capacity-building to developing countries for attaining SDGs related to social development) that make the connection between ideals and social reality within the EU and abroad.

Solidifying strategic partnerships across the Atlantic and among the BRICS+ countries

It is evident that the more and more intense organising of the BRICS, now called BRICS+, is a potential game changer for global politics and the equilibria on foreign affairs and development, potentially signalling a transition to multipolarity. So far, the EU has preferred to engage with BRICS+ countries individually. This may pave the way to new strategies and approaches. Presently, the EU has strategic partnerships with Brazil, India and South Africa, and is negotiating a free trade agreement with India. On the other hand, current conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza show contrasting approaches to security among various international players and power blocks.

The 2024 US election adds another layer of complexity. Regardless of the outcome of the election result, it will impact how the EU pursues its trade, foreign policy, defense and climate affairs. Many voices from the BRICS+ countries (and the Global South in general) have increased their criticism of the “West” (G7, NATO etc.) and expressed distrust with respect to the United States in particular. A reflection on how to avoid these detachments and how to reboot EU-US relations also in the context of rethinking and repositioning the Western block may soon be a necessity.

The new geopolitical scenario and the challenges posed to the current global order brings the EU and its member states opportunities to explore venues of dialogue and cooperation. Multilateral dialogue between the EU and countries in and around the BRICS+ group could allow them to identify a common roadmap and promote joint responses to issues of mutual interest and acknowledge the Global South's growing relevance in global decision-making and their critical role in key policies such as climate and energy, but also a better balanced global financial system (including through gradual de-dollarisation).

Designing a coherent and impactful approach to EU-Africa relations

In the context of a weaker multilateral system, the EU-Africa interregional partnership grows in importance and can create opportunities to tackle urgent challenges more effectively. The renewed interest in the African continent and an increased presence of external powers, such as the United States, China and Russia, mean that the EU must focus on its comparative advantages, both normative and pragmatic, in order to continuously build a strong partnership. Importantly, the European Union has to avoid a situation in which different national stances by member states weaken a common European position and deteriorate the relations with the African Union or African countries.

The EU, as a key partner to Africa, a major global economic and geostrategic actor, and the main international aid provider, stands at the forefront of the international response to support Africa's resilience and recovery from crises, as well as its longer-term sustainable, green and inclusive development. Yet, the question is to which extent the framework and initiatives for EU- Africa relations are still fit for purpose, in particular in terms of mobilisation of resources for Africa's resilience and sustainable development or must be adapted to better respond to the new era of poly-crises.

2. **MIGRATION** – informing and sustaining a fair debate on asylum and migration, with a particular focus on monitoring the implementation of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum and fostering adequate integration policies in all EU countries, defining the features of an efficient and humane management of migration and developing fair and balanced relations with the countries of origin and transit; whilst analysing the nexus between demographic changes in Europe and migration dynamics

2024 has been a historic year for EU migration policy. After years of political deadlock and tensions among MS on the management of migration, an agreement between Council and EP was reached on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, proposed by the Commission in September 2020. This political breakthrough, however, will not automatically sweep away the challenge of how to effectively manage migration to the EU. While the Pact provides the Union with a comprehensive legislative framework – moving away from the last decade's emergency-mode approach – it is to be seen: if the new instruments will prove up to the task; if all the MS will in practice abide by the new rules, particularly when it comes to solidarity; and if the MS will be able to efficiently implement the new legislations by 2026, when the Pact will start working at full capacity. The impact that the new rules will have on migrants and asylum seekers, on the respect of their rights and dignity is also to be seen. In the path towards the Pact's implementation, European Progressive will have to stand by their values to ensure that the EU stay true to its fundamental principles and international law. Moreover, the EU securitarian approach to migration management and the trend towards externalising controls will have to be carefully scrutinised to prevent abuse and include the perspectives and needs of the countries of origin and transit, including their path towards development. The MS will be called to overcome the paradox that characterise the EU approach to migration: an obsession with curtailing numbers of arrivals, on the one hand, and the need to fill labour shortages and attract talents to an aging continent, on the other. A task that only Progressives can carry out in the prospect of an inclusive and fair society, in which migrants can be full agents of their own lives.

Advancing the work within the Progressive Migration Group

In 2025 and forward, the PMG will continue its analysis of the relations between the EU and the African countries in the fields of migration. The focus will continue to be on externalisation of migration, oversecuritisation of migration policies, on the interplay between migration and other European policies, such as development and on the establishment of legal pathways, together with more effective integration strategies, with the final aim of thinking out of the box and elaborate innovative policy proposals.

Monitoring the implementation of the Pact

The new asylum and migration rules introduced by the Pact will enter into application after two years, as of 12 June 2026. Monitoring their implementation by the EU member states and identifying weaknesses, inconsistencies, gaps and criticalities, particularly when it comes to the question of the solidarity instruments and ensuring the respects of migrants' rights and dignity should represent one of the main tasks for the next couple of years. This could build on the New Pact Implementation policy studies published in the course of 2024 and be realised through publication of policy briefs and organisation of workshops.

Consolidating a progressive approach to migration

In a Europe that is increasingly turning right, migration is consistently used as a smokescreen and a scapegoat from unscrupulous far-right politicians and political movements and parties, and growingly from the centre-right, who is adopting and embracing extreme-right stances. Against this background, the temptation for some European progressive forces to also fall in the trap, abandon integration and move towards a conservative approach is a real risk. The question of what a progressive approach to migration should be needs to be tackled for Progressivism not to lose its soul and to push for a migration management that put people at its core. Building on the work done in the past on migration narrative and disinformation, FEPS may organise workshops and conference aimed at discussing the basics of a progressive migration policy, and formulating a toolkit for progressive politicians.

Solving the European migration paradox

European member states are torn between opposing goals in the field of migration. On the one hand, migration policies in the EU are characterised by the obsession of decreasing the numbers of arrival to the European Union. But on the other hand, EU member states are oppressed by the awareness, that in European aging societies, the contribution given by migrants to the member states' economy and welfare states is essential. How can move from the above-mentioned obsession to curtail arrivals and to build a European fortress to an approach that fully embrace the idea of a welcoming and inclusive

EU? This question should be addressed urgently in light of demographic trends in the EU and in the African countries.

3. **SOCIAL EUROPE** – ensuring the relevance and implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in the new legislature, expanding social objectives and EU integration in the field of health and wellbeing, deepening the debate on decent work alongside promotion of a new approach to public services and housing policies, while fighting new poverties and anticipating on demographic change.

As Europe continues to navigate a complicated socio-economic landscape, the need for a robust and inclusive Social Europe remains critical. In the 2025 FEPS Work Plan this work will be organised around two main axes. On the one side, the work on EU social policies to reinforce the role of the EPSR as a compass for EU policy action (also by monitoring adherence to the targets established by the Porto social summit in 2021), mainstream social outcomes across different European policy areas, and support the identification of tools and competencies that EU can put in place to fight inequalities in health and housing. The second axis will more broadly focus on understanding the social implications of the transitions, demographic change and shifts in global order with the objective of acknowledging trends, supporting early warning and identifying good practices or new progressive narratives that can win the fight of protecting welfare policy. This should serve to inspire political action at the national level, too, with the objective of identifying, in these modern times, the fights that can mark our unwavering support for social justice.

In the context of European policymaking, 2025 is a pivotal year. The EU must still re-balance and finalise the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and implement projects financed by the RRF, address the ongoing effects of geopolitical tensions and cost crisis, and confront long-standing structural issues such as inequality, demographic shifts, and the digital transition. Simultaneously, the international agenda, shaped by commitments to the SDGs and upcoming global summits, including the UN 2025 Summit on Social Development, underscores the necessity for comprehensive social policies. FEPS's commitment to advancing Social Europe will focus on several key areas to ensure that social policies are not only reactive but also proactive, innovative, and equitable.

This thematic block includes several lines of action encompassing the expansion of social rights, the strengthening of welfare services, and the improvement of employment standards. However, to have a complete overview of FEPS priorities in the sphere of social policies one has to look also at the lines of actions included in the Gender Equality thematic block – see for instance, the work on care and the

equality agenda – in the Climate thematic block – see for instance the work on the just transition and the socio-ecological welfare provisions - and in the digital policy thematic block – see for instance the work on algorithmic management and the future of work.

Relaunching and Expanding the Social Pillar: Housing and Public Services

As we begin the new legislative cycle, it is essential to prioritize the European Pillar of Social Rights to ensure it remains a guiding and inspiring force for EU action. The Pillar serves not only as a framework for shaping social policies but also as a key instrument for influencing socio-economic governance across the Union. By keeping its principles at the forefront, we can foster an economy that works for everyone. Strengthening the EU's social dimension involves rethinking socio-economic governance to better integrate social objectives with economic policies. This includes enhancing the European Semester's social dimension, ensuring that social indicators are given equal weight to economic ones in assessing member states' performance.

Alongside monitoring its implementation and ensuring its *mise en œuvre*, FEPS will also seek to develop new ideas on how the Pillar can be expanded. We will investigate and support policymaking to advance principles that have so far been overlooked, such as the right to affordable housing (Art. 19) and the provision of quality public services (Art. 20). These areas are essential to building a more inclusive and resilient Europe, ensuring that the benefits of economic growth and social protection are shared by all citizens. Point one: the housing crisis is faced by many Europeans, exacerbated by rising costs and inadequate social housing. Thanks to the effort of the Progressives, who included housing among the top EU political priorities, now there is a historical opportunity to bring value and coherence to the European people by ending homelessness, making the housing market more just, fostering energy efficiency by building and contrast market forces that make the costs spike.

Point two: public services and services of general interest are cornerstones of social Europe, which is crucial in promoting social inclusion and reducing inequalities. Protecting and enhancing these services is essential for ensuring that all citizens have access to quality healthcare, education, social care, and utilities. FEPS work will continue safeguarding public services from privatization and marketization, promoting universal access, and ensuring that these services are adequately funded with national and European resources. Additionally, supporting innovations in public service delivery, particularly in digital services, can enhance accessibility and efficiency, ensuring that public services meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Setting benchmarks for Employment: quality and innovation

FEPS work in 2025 shall cover employment policy in an innovative and forward-looking manner, aligning with the "Good Jobs Agenda" that made its way in the Political Guidelines of the new Commission, thanks to the push of trade unions and the progressives. Focusing on good jobs includes exploring new avenues of work and the innovations that have been brought to the labor markets in recent years. For instance, shorter working weeks has proven to be a progressive model which can enhance work-life balance and productivity while reducing unemployment. Additionally, the concept of local job guarantee programs, providing public employment opportunities for all willing and able to work, and bringing forward a directive for minimum wages could serve as a powerful tool against structural unemployment and poverty and foster a just transition. Other aspects of innovation in employment can be found in the area of democracy in the workplace in which still too much heterogeneity exists in Europe, and good practices, such as co-determination, for instance – are not spreading and multiplying as much or as fast as needed. These initiatives aim to create a more dynamic, inclusive labor market that empowers workers and supports a fairer economic recovery.

Addressing the challenges of demography, intergenerational fairness and social mobility

Europe faces significant demographic shifts, including an aging population and declining birth rates, which pose challenges to social systems and economic stability. On top of that, migration and mobility patterns do not seem to contribute much to stability and unity; rather, they reinforce the gap between countries.

Addressing these changes requires policies that promote intergenerational justice, ensuring that all generations benefit fairly from social protections and economic opportunities. This includes reforming pension systems, investing in childcare and education, and promoting active aging and lifelong learning. Additionally, fostering solidarity between generations can help mitigate potential conflicts and ensure that the social contract remains robust and inclusive in the face of demographic change.

A lack of social mobility entrenches inequality, preventing individuals from escaping poverty or advancing socio-economically, which undermines social cohesion and economic dynamism. In today's context of wage stagnation and growing inequality, policies that promote access to quality education, fair wages, and affordable housing are crucial to breaking these cycles. Emerging good practices include targeted investments in vocational training, affordable childcare, and inclusive digital skills programs, which help equip disadvantaged groups with the tools to succeed in evolving labor markets. Additionally, progressive tax reforms and active labor market policies, like job guarantee schemes, are gaining traction as effective ways to support upward mobility.

Pursuing the topics of Health & Mental Health within a new agenda for Europe

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed stark disparities in healthcare access and quality across EU member states, highlighting the urgent need for a cohesive European Health Union. While the European Union has made initial strides towards integration and the creation of common policies on health and mental health, this process remains in its early stages. Progressives must intensify efforts to relaunch the vision for a European Health Union and push forward a comprehensive European Mental Health Strategy during this legislative period. This work will focus not only on the institutional dimensions—clarifying EU competencies and advancing multi-level governance in health policy—but also on deepening the policy aspects that will shape a resilient Health Union. Key priorities include addressing the mobility of healthcare workers, integrating mental health into publicly funded healthcare systems, building large-scale EU infrastructure to foster pharmaceutical innovation, combating cancer and rare diseases, and revamping the internal market for medicines to ensure fair pricing.

Forging Social Development through international angle of social policy

The commitment of the progressives for social justice does not end at Europe's borders. The UN 2025 Summit on Social Development represents a significant opportunity for the EU to showcase its commitment to social progress and influence the global social agenda. FEPS should advocate for the EU to play a leading role not only in this summit but more largely on reshaping the global order and managing the global transitions emphasizing the importance of sustainable social policies that address inequality, poverty, and social exclusion. A great preparatory work to influence international politics in this direction may start with a comprehensive review of the EU's social development policies, aligning them with the SDGs and ensuring they are fit for purpose in a rapidly changing world. This process will require collaboration with international partners, civil society, and other stakeholders to develop a cohesive and impactful European stance.

4. **ECONOMY AND FINANCE** – designing a resilient and sustainable economic development model, with a goal to design policy proposals towards a job-rich industrial policy, European fiscal capacity and fair taxation to support the innovative, fair and productive economy, and scaling up of economic democracy.

The European Union will face significant and challenging trends in the coming five years, which could threaten the stability of the European project. The rise of global rivalries and geopolitical risks requires upgrading European policies and capacities, notably enhancing its defence capabilities and ensuring economic security. At the same time, achieving these priorities must not come at the cost of other critical goals, such as advancing the green and digital transition with social equity and regional cohesion. The challenge is huge, as the economy of the EU needs to be relaunched and protected with respect to the global competition, whilst being modernized, revitalized and transformed.

At the same time, the rise of the far right is closely related to the impoverishment and feeling of helplessness among the ordinary people, therefore, social justice and economic empowerment of the people become a matter of preservation of social peace in Europe. Right wing politics appears to be shaping the future of the EU economy, with a push for this legislature on spending for defence and competitiveness. These are the two angles that demand from the side of social democrats the ability to find narratives and concrete policies that substantiate our values in these new Commission's initiatives, particularly to make sure that EU financial resources are not allocated to industries and in manners that contribute to divergence.

A key issue for the next legislative period will be how to finance essential priorities (health, housing, just transition, economic development, etc.) and other European public goods simultaneously. The revision of the EU fiscal rules brought some temporary relaxation for member states' fiscal space, but the extent of this leeway is far below the needs and it is yet not clear how these new rules will impact public spending in the medium term. In such context, the upcoming elaboration of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) becomes an important opportunity to upgrade the EU fiscal and investment capacity.

A more volatile and insecure environment - both in geopolitical and environmental terms - requires the EU to enhance its resilience. One of the focus areas is inflation and general shock preparedness. It is by now clear that shocks are always around the corner, and the Union has done much to be more responsive to unexpected shocks and recessions, but still the tools for countercyclical policymaking are very limited and a proper tool-kit for a well-prepared public sector must still be devised.

While responding to the many challenges, the EU should not get lost in a reactive mood. The new legislature needs to be used as an opportunity to drive change, taking advantage of the Letta and Draghi reports to launch a paradigm shift. This is a chance for the progressive forces to advance the vision of an economy that ensures flourishing for all. In particular, the concept of security should encompass bolstering social and democratic resilience. The ambitious industrial and competitiveness agenda should see the emergence of a vibrant and capable state sector and the reclaiming of public space. Industrial policy should mean the rejuvenation of regions and the reclaiming of democratic control over public goods. This should be accompanied by overall de-monopolisation and democratisation of the economy.

Investing for Europe's Future

The current strategic priorities of the EU require substantial investments: the green, digital and social transitions, and now increasingly defence. How to finance all that without jeopardising one of the priorities is a daunting task. The reform of the European fiscal rules that was completed in spring of 2024 brought some flexibility for investments at the member state level, however, the size of possible leeway is far below the needed ambition. The next opportunity comes with the MFF revision, on which the discussions will start in 2025. This is a chance to enhance EU fiscal capacity, ideally creating a European fund, based on joint borrowing, for financing of the green/digital industrial policy. Learning from the RRF governance, some changes might be needed to modernize the cohesion policy, but without compromising the ability of European regions to steer their development. There are other diverse possible sources for EU financing: taxes (on pollution, on resource use, on wealth), public ownership and better management of public assets (rent payments), strategic public procurement, enhancing the role of the EIB and national promotional banks, monetary financing etc. FEPS wants to help find and promote progressive ideas on EU financing instruments.

Finding the progressive angle for competitiveness, internal market and industrial policy

The presentation of the Draghi Report highlights the centrality of competitiveness within the policy agenda of the incoming European Commission. The emerging narrative around it, however, is ambivalent. Different political and economic actors promote definitions of “competitiveness” that are useful for them but not necessarily for the society as a whole. FEPS feels it necessary to develop a progressive vision of competitiveness and for better functioning of the internal market - the vision that would advance the common good and a balanced path for economic progress. For instance, progressives should prevent subsidies from being distributed to large incumbent firms and monopolies to get even stronger – all in the name of competitiveness. A solid social democratic vision should centre on expanding productivity, innovation and social and regional cohesion. It intersects in many ways with the ongoing construction of the European industrial policy, but also raises the question of the European Single Market (ESM) design. The current ESM set-up is challenged by the needs of the green/digital/social transition. Notably, regional divergence is increasing and threatens to undermine the ESM. FEPS will continue its work on advancing the progressive vision of industrial policy and aims to frame and promote a progressive vision of competitiveness which can secure the future of European manufacturing (with particular attention to sectors like car industry). To achieve shared prosperity, regional and social cohesion policies must be part of the same process.

Tackling inflation and anticipating shocks better

Even though the inflation crisis looks to be over, there was very little learning and policy adjustment in its aftermath. There is clearly unfinished business on this topic. Apart from the reform of the European electricity market, there was very little done that would prevent or mitigate an inflation

shock in the future. Instruments to address supply-side shocks are lacking and vulnerabilities in different markets remain. There is an urgent need for a policy toolkit for dealing with inflation to be developed and institutionalised and to equip the Union and member states with the means to anticipate and effectively react to economic shocks and recessions. There are many different streams of work here: creating early warning systems and crisis preparedness mechanisms, curbing speculation in commodity markets (especially food and energy), dismantling monopolies and enhancing competition in key sectors (notably in the food supply chain), and so on. If these reforms are not done, the EU is left vulnerable to future shocks (and they will come, as weather and geopolitical shocks become more frequent).

Striving for economic democracy

FEPS is going to continue developing the theme of economic democracy that it launched in 2023. The democratisation of the economy is the next frontier for social democracy. Without an economic dimension, democracy remains limited. The economy is not an end in itself; for us social progress and well-being that matters, and the economy is just a means. Importantly, expanding the democracy around economic decision-making implies also a reshaping of the balance of powers to become more inclusive. In such a way we can frame economic democracy not only as a redistribution of resources, but also as a redistributions of powers. FEPS will continue to promote this idea both within social democratic circles and with the broader public. After a theoretical overview and the creation of a network of practitioners in 2024, we envisage doing more applied projects. Examples of possible streams of work include: (1) spreading practices of local well-being economy in collaboration with local administrations, (2) employee ownership, cooperatives and social economy and design of supportive policies at the EU level, (3) reduce the power of platform monopolies to democratise the economy.

Rethinking Trade

The rise of geostrategic rivalries is posing a major challenge for the EU. European Union is built on a premise of peaceful cooperative international relations and, therefore, finds it challenging to find its way in the world of rivalries and use of economic policies for strategic purposes. In particular, the ambitious industrial policies of major global powers- the US and China – challenge European competitiveness. Moreover, the needs of green and social industrial transition also require adaptation of the trade policy to serve these priorities. This calls for a rethink of the European trade policy. What kind of trade policy would help build a competitive economy and flourishing society in Europe? How to make sure there are no losers from trade both inside and outside of the EU? How to make trade policy serve European values (fairness, solidarity, democracy etc)? What does it mean for international trade arrangements? FEPS envisages doing conceptual work here and extensive discussions/brainstorming with relevant stakeholders.

5. **CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT** – addressing the climate emergency and supporting the implementation of the European Green Deal, with a commitment to search for further equitable ways to reach ambitious climate and environmental goals globally, create new clean jobs and mainstream climate and ecological objectives in European policies.

FEPS is actively engaged in advancing a progressive climate and environmental agenda, with a portfolio structured around three connected lines of work: i) Just Transition, ii) Clean Energy and Investment, and iii) the External Dimension of European Climate Policy. Central to this agenda is the EU Green Deal, which is in its implementation phase and thereby guides FEPS' climate and environmental work. The aim is to give evidence-based recommendations to transform the European economy into one that does not destroy the planet while ensuring a high quality of life for all Europeans – a *clean eco-system Europe*. The work extends beyond Europe, striving to support sustainable development and the well-being of people globally.

The work on the Just Transition focuses on ensuring that the shift to a clean economy is socially equitable, particularly for workers and communities in high-carbon industries. This includes impact-assessments of the EGD implementation as well as debating best-practices in the context of Just Transition observatories. Crucially, this involves also a reflection on the narrative around the EU Green Deal that has to be seen and perceived as part of a wellbeing agenda, to contrast the right-wing approach that portrait the climate agenda as a hassle for the people.

The Clean Energy and Investment line emphasizes the need for substantial investment in clean technologies and industries. FEPS developed frameworks to guide policy makers towards clean-tech innovation and sustainable industrial growth, ensuring that Europe remains competitive while reducing its carbon footprint and maintaining the high social standards. From RePowerEU to the Green Deal Industrial Strategy, many things will have to be monitored but at the same time FEPS has to be instrumental for the progressives to identify and raise the ambitions for a coherent green deal industrial plan that boosts clean energy and competitiveness, whilst upholding social and territorial cohesion.

The External Dimension of European Climate Policy recognizes that Europe's climate ambitions cannot be realized in isolation. FEPS published reports on the impact of CBAM and practical guidance on working with partners that provide raw materials to improve supply chain standards. In 2025, contributions will be geared towards crucial events such as the negotiations towards the UN climate conference in Brazil (COP-30), the UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 16), and the UN Ocean

Conference. Through these efforts, FEPS aims to ensure that Europe plays a leading role in global climate and environmental governance, promoting policies that safeguard the planet and global prosperity.

Advancing the EU agenda for climate and wellbeing through the European Green Deal

The European Green Deal (EUGD) is the EU's strategy for achieving climate neutrality by 2050, focusing on decarbonization, biodiversity protection, and sustainable economic growth. Currently, the EU has made significant progress, including the adoption of the Climate Law and Fit for 55 package, which aims to reduce emissions by 55% by 2030. However, challenges remain in balancing economic interests with environmental goals and ensuring a just transition for all member states.

Moving forward, the focus will be on effectively implementing these policies, increasing investments in clean technologies, and enhancing global cooperation.

The work of FEPS will accompany the EUGD implementation by tracking its impacts and deriving tangible policy recommendations – building on the work of the 2024 climate program. FEPS will also offer insights into new legislative proposals derived from the EUGD, and continue its work on the Just Transition by monitoring Just Transition observatories and contributing to the thinking around the future of the Just transition fund and mechanism.

Rethinking the supply chains sustainability

Sustainable supply chains are crucial for reducing environmental impact and ensuring ethical practices. The EU's Supply Chain Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) as part of the EGD mandates companies to identify, prevent, and mitigate human rights abuses and environmental harm in their supply chains.

The CSDDD raises the question of whether the EU can enforce regulations beyond its borders, especially given the global nature of supply chains. While the directive has the potential to set global standards, its effectiveness depends on cooperation from non-EU countries and multinational corporations. FEPS in this context might work in two directions: i) the integration of eco-social conditionalities in supply chain regulation, ensuring that environmental sustainability and social justice are embedded in trade and investment agreements; ii) the revival of state-owned enterprises particularly in the raw materials sector, in order to put an emphasis on the human dimension of extractive practices and contrast the capitalist domination of natural resources.

Gearing up for COP-30 and the international agenda for climate justice

COP-30, to be hosted by Brazil, is set to be a pivotal moment in the international climate justice agenda. A key focus will be on increasing the ambition of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), as nations are urged to enhance their commitments to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in line with the Paris Agreement's goals. Climate finance will also be a critical issue, with discussions on how to ensure adequate funding for vulnerable countries to adapt to climate impacts and transition to greener economies.

Building on the international network of partners involved in climate justice and good governance, and with the collaboration of key Brazilian partners, FEPS will produce suggestions on the next-level European climate ambitions and make proposals how to share the financial burden of climate adaptation.

FEPS is particularly concerned with the voice and role of countries mostly affected by climate change, which needs to be more involved into identifying solutions and governance methods ensuring climate justice for all.

Investing in the clean-technologies and investment for energy and climate

Clean and climate tech presents Europe with a crucial opportunity to remain globally competitive and become a leader in sustainable innovation. To seize this chance, substantial investment is required. In the context of the upcoming negotiations on the EU budget and with the right wing focusing on minimizing the role of the public sector to rely only on private finance, the role of a European progressive foundation becomes strategically relevant to find ways in which the European public sector with new tools and financing can steer finance towards attaining climate neutrality.

FEPS will develop a framework for Europe's funding schemes to be structured to prioritize projects that integrate socio-ecological conditionalities, ensuring community-owned assets receive advantages over private investments. By aligning funding with broader socio-ecological goals, Europe can foster inclusive growth, drive technological advancements, and enhance environmental resilience. This strategy not only supports local communities but also positions Europe at the forefront of the green revolution, driving both economic and ecological progress.

Pursuing the transformation into the clean ecosystem Europe

Developing a cohesive vision for a "clean ecosystem Europe" is crucial for guiding investment and policy-making over the next decade. This vision should set clear, ambitious goalposts, such as achieving net-zero emissions, promoting circular economies, and enhancing biodiversity. By defining specific targets and pathways, it provides citizens and policymakers with a roadmap for aligning efforts and

resources. Such a framework ensures coherence in investments, drives innovation, and fosters public and private sector collaboration. It also facilitates accountability and progress tracking, making it easier to adapt strategies and achieve long-term sustainability goals. Ultimately, a unified vision will steer Europe toward becoming a global leader in environmental stewardship and sustainable development.

6. **DIGITAL ECONOMY AND SOCIETY** – assessing the effects of accelerated digital transformation for European societies and economies, exploring how AI impacts workers, how we keep our democracy healthy in times of social media and how Europe can create its digital model for an autonomous, progressive path towards technological development that supports public services.

The digital transformation is a self-driving process that has gathered speed over the past decade. The developments in AI have dominated the headlines in the past year, but we need to distinguish between partly the self-created hype of those in the AI industry and real-life consequences for workers and citizens. One of those concrete applications has been the introduction of algorithmic management tools in workplaces. A development tested and tried by platform workers is now being deployed in traditional sectors, with many adverse consequences for workers. Another aspect is how algorithms determine what we see on social media, how we are being influenced and targeted by advertisements, and how online marketplaces are being stacked in favour of the Big Tech platforms. The European legislator has been at the forefront of regulating the tech industry. First, it set a global standard for data privacy with the GDPR, and more recently, it regulated Big Tech in the Digital Services and Market Acts and ended the last legislative term with the first comprehensive AI legislation in the world. This also means that there is less space for introducing new legislation in the new legislative period. It will be about enforcing the newly created framework, a legal battle with the Big Tech companies with deep pockets to fight their case. Europe will need to be persistent in safeguarding the 'Brussels Effect' and exerting its role as the global regulator in the digital world. However, regulation alone will not suffice to create a European model for digital transformation. We need capacity building, an EU tech ecosystem based on our values and serving our citizens. There is a need for public digital infrastructure to provide public services, SMEs, and industry alternatives to Silicon Valley tools. Right now, they are all locked into the ecosystem that prioritises gathering personal data, making Europe too reliant on these big companies and their billionaire owners. The solution would be to build a European Tech Stack as part of an EU Digital Industrial Policy. Also, we need to investigate alternative ways of data sharing that would open opportunities for European actors. There have been openings in the newly introduced legislation regarding Health and Green Data Spaces and the notions of interoperability and data intermediation. But these ideas need to become concrete and will depend on public digital

infrastructure to function smoothly and provide a viable alternative for our essential services and European companies that want to grow their business in a different more sustainable way.

Ensuring the Algorithmic Management and EU regulation

How we work is changing rapidly due to the introduction of algorithmic management tools to perform and automate tasks that managers previously performed. The implications differ depending on the sector, but this affects blue- and white-collar workers alike. A general thread is that it allows for new forms of micro-management and continuous surveillance of workers that do not align with the European social model. As we found in a FEPS-Nordic survey of 6,000 workers, there are serious adverse effects on autonomy, trust and well-being, with the risk of unsustainable workload levels, stress and job insecurity. These effects can be mitigated by transparency and worker influence. Still, for a part, we need to set limits and guardrails to algorithms in the workplace from an Occupational Health and Safety viewpoint. That is why it is essential that European legislators carefully consider new EU legislation on AI in the workplace to complement the AI Act and reinforce the existing labour legislation protecting workers in this new digital reality. Social partners, specifically trade unions, can play a crucial role in implementing algorithmic management in a worker-centric manner.

Building Public Digital Infrastructure and Digital Industrial policy

Like traditional infrastructure, digital infrastructure has become essential for the functioning of our economy and society. As citizens, we are exposed to serious cybersecurity risks from relying on privately owned and run infrastructure platforms for essential services in our daily lives. There are few alternatives for the Big Tech-developed solutions and applications, at least not with the same functionality and reliability. Europe should and could create its own digital infrastructure tech stack that, on different layers of the technology that run our digital world, would take a different approach than the tools developed in the US. By building this infrastructure for and in essential public services like health, education and public media, we can set up an ecosystem of applications and developers that could also benefit the private sector. The reliance on and lock-in effects of the current tools is hurting the European industry's competitiveness and making us waste public money on IT solutions.

Modernizing public administration and welfare with AI and digital tools

Aside from potential oversell and hype, AI is an up-and-coming technology that will not only disrupt industries and markets but can also be used to significantly improve the public administration and services we provide to citizens. One aspect would be the enforcement of rules in the field of taxation with AI-driven personalised audits. But as we have seen in the Toeslagenschandaal (benefits scandal) in the Netherlands, this is not without risks. AI models and algorithmic tools can quickly lead to unintended discriminatory outcomes without a quick fix. That is why there should always be a human

in control of the decisions taken with the help of algorithms. It is interesting to see what is possible if we run AI models on more secure and high-quality datasets, as they are now being developed by some Member States. We know that a lot can be gained in efficiency from AI-powered applications, but we should make sure that the risks of use cases are mitigated, which is also the approach of the AI Act. Another more specific field where AI can be a game-changer in the field of education, training and development because of the personalised approach per student. The technology promises that each student can be coached by an AI bot, like a personal trainer and teacher. This will fundamentally change this significant and vital sector of our society, and we should involve the teachers in this discussion.

Proposing Community-led approaches to data governance

In the current data economy, data is hoarded by big tech firms for private gain and profit. This is central to the surveillance capitalist model deployed by Silicon Valley to exploit the private data of citizens. There are many angles to look at these issues; even from a free-market perspective, these platforms have created their monopoly within their walled garden and are extracting rents at the expense of European society and economy. As a consumer, you do not have a free choice to consent to this exploitation in a digital society where you cannot function without specific digital tools. As progressives, we shape the markets and capitalism to benefit people and society in the market economy. How we treat, control and share our data could be essential to achieving this in the digital age of AI. By splitting the data from the platforms or allowing for data intermediation, we can make the notion of data spaces concrete. The new digital EU acquis introduces the concepts of data intermediation and interoperability in the DMA, the Data and Data Governance Act. We can take this as a starting point to rethink the digital economy, starting from the possibilities of using data to create welfare and not only growth and profit for rent-seeking big tech companies.

Designing Place-Based Industrial Policy for the Twin Transition

The twin digital and green transition, together with demographic transformation, the housing crisis and geopolitical developments like the war in Ukraine, should remain on the top of the European policy agenda. These different aspects come together in the facts on the ground, in regions where the consequences are felt. This is where the Twin Transition, or the investments in the European defence system, can have positive effects. Areas where rare minerals are regenerated through mining activities, the green energy revolution is creating jobs in regions with many natural resources, and the digital transformation is creating new hotspots of IT development or places where the chip sector is thriving on R&D and research. Europe should consider the opportunities and learn from the experiences in the bright spots around Europe to inspire a new and more effective regional cohesion policy. Also, the needed investments in both green and digital transformation must be channelled practically, attaining

the maximum results with the limited investment capacity within the European budget. We need a mission-driven industrial policy that builds capacity and is accompanied by the right public policy on all levels of government to impact our citizens positively.

7. **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 is a core value under the Treaties, with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 having paved the way for an ambitious set of progressive gender policies. After celebrating its major achievements for equality, as its due date approaches, the burning question is now *what next?* The feminist dream of a “Union of Equality” for Europe may have made some progress but the journey remains a long and arduous one. Significant gender gaps still exist in the labour market and in decision-making, including political representation. Violence against women, including femicide, remains common. Gender stereotypes about the role of women in society still hold true for too many people, including gender-normative attitudes toward care and economic power. According to the 2024 SDG Gender Index, at the current pace, global gender equity won’t be achieved until the 22nd century. As dismal as this scenario is, even that trajectory may be optimistic given the intersecting crises that are set to dominate the coming years. Knowing that 74% of the SDG targets won’t be achieved without gender equality, the stakes are high. Gender equality is closely linked with democracy but the foundations of democracies around the world are at risk with societies moving towards political extremes alongside a growing gap between the values held by women and men, not to mention the growing backlash against women’s rights. That is why progressive forces play an essential role in strengthening gender-transformative approaches as the EU is about to start a new chapter with the start of this new mandate.

Securing funding for gender equality

Securing funding for gender equality will certainly constitute one of the most crucial challenges of the coming legislature. Several interconnected crises are linked to resources, democracy, safety, and security which are all already having a negative impact on gender equality. Feminist movements are facing a severe resource crunch due to rising economic inequality, societal and political polarization, and the closing of civic space. Simultaneously insufficient and unsustainable international financing flows alongside domestic austerity measures are making it less likely that public funds will be invested in ways that protect and advance gender equality, which, in turn, affects services and protection for women and girls. Far from being neutral, public spending can perpetuate, reduce or increase existing

inequalities. Further implementing gender budgeting and elevating it to the highest political level will precisely be one of the key challenges for the next EP term. By considering the gendered impacts of fiscal policies, gender budgeting can correct imbalances such as unequal pay, underrepresentation in decision-making roles, and limited access to services like healthcare and education whilst taking into account aspects such as unpaid care work. That in turn affects overall macroeconomic performance.

Redefining the European Feminist Foreign Policy

Ensuring resources for women's rights is also closely connected with the concept of 'safety and security', which are often only seen through the lens of violent conflict and militarization, both on the rise. For women and girls, these realities hit their bodies, their choices and their personal safety first. Likewise, the UN estimates that 80 percent of the people being displaced by climate change are women and girls. That is precisely why the question of a "feminist foreign policy" calls for further support. Despite some progress in putting this perspective into the agenda, the discussion on feminist foreign policy has not gained a truly European dimension so far. Can we speak of a "European feminist foreign policy" and, if so, what are the characteristics and practices associated with such policy? The EU should lead by example. Feminist scholarship has namely started to interrogate the hegemonic masculinities inherent in foreign and security policy. Clearly, the implementation of gender equality throughout EU action could lead to a more gender-sensitive approach to EU engagement in the field and a deeper understanding of the gender agenda rather than it being seen as an "add on" to existing more important security activities traditionally claimed as 'gender neutral'. Therefore, FEPS sets out to better understand the challenges for the EU in entrenching a progressive vision of gender in its core, not only in terms of promoting gender equality as a goal of EU foreign policy, but also in making EU foreign policy-making more inclusive, diverse, and with equal participation of women.

Strengthening care work and infrastructures

Another area of work that will remain central in FEPS work relates to strengthening care work and infrastructures. As the EU finds itself at a critical juncture, and whilst much attention is paid to industrial policy and the 'productive' economy, the work of FEPS will argue that the latter is *dependent* on the care sector, even if this is often ignored in most policies assuming an unlimited (and free) supply of care work. The EU's macroeconomic policies and the governance mechanisms through which they are implemented are pivotal for the future of gender equality in the EU because they actively maintain gendered and racialised hierarchies in the European economy. Informed by feminist thinking, we therefore need to highlight how much the functioning of the economy depends on the maintenance and reproduction of particular relations between the state and households, held in place by gendered socialisation. Influenced by socialist feminism and feminist economics, feminist political economy pays specific attention to how power, gender and the productive and reproductive economies intertwine. FEPS draws on this approach to point out the central role of gender (inequalities) in the maintenance

of the economy and the state. The delegation of care work to households, in which many women perform this (unpaid) labour is one of the most important of these relations. Similarly, the low wages paid for work as nursing, childcare and elder care or in domestic work rest on an undervaluation of care and reproductive work. These female-dominated jobs and public sector services are often seen as a cost, rather than an investment. In contrast to mainstream accounts, FEPS wants to highlight that this situation constitutes a reproductive tax extracted from women to subsidize the productive economy.

Ensuring equal rights and equal representation

The discussion around the efforts to ensure a gender-balanced Commission has exposed how much work remains to accomplish real parity in women's political representation, access to power and leadership positions, and equal treatment in recognition of their respective political and professional credentials. This has been a bitter and mobilizing lesson, and Progressives have to invest efforts to prevent such a situation from ever occurring in the future. This calls for building on the guidelines that exist in the Gender Equality Strategy and expanding them to ensure real and effective gender mainstreaming. There is a need for reinforcing mechanisms that could ensure greater inclusiveness and could help, especially young women, when taking the first steps and advancing in the world of politics. To that end, there is a necessity to reinforce women's organizations, especially inside of the socialist movement, and to look at women of all generation's participation in politics, in parties' leaderships and in governing positions. What is key is not focus though exclusively on the inner-party or inner-institutional rules (such as parties and zip systems), which should be considered indispensable to enact the change, but not as an end goal. Enhancing women's participation and say in politics requires seeing that in the context in which women face other obstacles preventing them from engaging fully (including here i.e. socio-economic dimension and gender pay gap, lack of accessibility to adequate finances for NGOs activities, violence and abuse based on gender stereotypes in media, and others). FEPS is committed to working further on these issues, providing data and space for debate on how to improve and serve itself as an example.

Empowering the LGBTQI+ people

The previous mandate saw much backlash when it came to mainstreaming equality and fighting diverse discrimination. In particular, it has been the LGBTQI+ communities that have been faced with disgusting practices, such as the establishment of LGBT-free zones in Poland. The European Commissioner pushed back effectively, but it is clear that it is high time to reinforce EU's commitment in overall terms. In that spirit, FEPS is committed to working with the sister organizations, and Rainbow Rose in particular, to ensure that the empowerment of all and boosting intersectional measures,

alongside specific provisions to empower LGBTQI+ people are at the core of the new Gender Equality Strategy.

8. **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 European Union has been in need of internal reform. On one hand, there is a clear necessity that results from the fact that the current institutional architecture, decision-making processes and capacities to act are no longer apt for Europe, which wants to be a power in the 21st century. The evidence that many of the adaptations are overdue has been clearly exposed by the poly-crisis, whereby in many aspects, the EU has had neither competence nor the means to deliver – while being expected to do so, both by the Member States and by the citizens. But even more so, looking at the legislative period 2024 – 2029, it is clear that if it is to be a runway towards an enlargement – drawing from the previous experiences as well, one must realize that to expand, it needs to transform, especially since the aspiration remains to strive for a strong, resilient and effective Europe that matters geopolitically as an actor that acts coherently.

On the other hand, although today, the Conference on the Future of Europe may seem to have been a long time ago, it has left the Union with a number of important lessons. To start with, the citizens are much more informed and much more willing to engage than ever before, but whilst they do, they need to be listened to and also responded to. This is why there is an entire part of the Political Union dimension that would require modernization to facilitate participatory and deliberative democracy, to empower citizens and civil society organizations, and to ensure that creativity and contribution through such as the European Citizens Initiative receive the attention they deserve. Furthermore, especially on the side of the political stakeholders, there needs to be further thought given to how to advance on the dossier that have been blocked and could unleash the potential of the European representative democracy – with special attention here to the electoral reform, and the reform of the regulations concerning the europarties and the European political foundations.

These issues are of paramount importance because the EU must be further enabled. To that end, these and other reforms are not a matter of a bureaucratic and niche type of conversation but stand for defining relations inside of the EU as well. Looking at the current plan, the responsibility for the internal reform seems to be placed in the hands of the conservatives, whose vision for Europe has always been the Europe of nations and not a federal Europe. The Progressives must regain the ground here, especially since there is also a danger that any attempt at treaty reform may also be used negatively

by the others, who are Euro-sceptic or anti-European and would like to see the EU powers shrank. While before they had been on the political fringes, today they have a say inside of the EP and inside of the Council

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 more cohesive Europe. The research and deliberations conducted about potential treaties reform (including those pertaining 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) maintain their relevance also in the future.

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, having also conducted 2023 – 2024 a major multistakeholder project with FES Brussels. It resulted in a depository of materials, which included another set of recommendations for strengthening of the europarties, better use of the Spitzencandidate system, how to make the europarties system more representative and paths that could bring back the question of the reform of the transnational electoral system. Following the campaign in 2024 and its aftermath, the materials are being supplemented with the new analyses with an intention to remain useful ahead of any potential internal reform of the PES and ahead of the mid-term and first deliberation ahead of 2029 campaign.

Preparing the Enlargement

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was a wake-up call for the EU Member States, exposing the frailty of the Europe’s security architecture and the urgency to move on with enlargement negotiations towards Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, whose accession process was in a stalemate.

However, this renewed political will to enlarge the Union needs to be continuously boosted in the face of the Union's lack of credibility vis-à-vis the WB6, after years of political reticence. Against this background, and with the awareness that enlargement to the Western Balkans represents a strategic necessity as well as a moral duty, in 2025, FEPS will organise its activities on the WB6, around a Western Balkans Programme, aimed at streamlining activities, maximise resources and improve synergies with its partners engaged in the region. The programme's goal will be to support progressive forces' fight for democracy and path to accession.

Rebuilding the EU – UK relationship

FEPS has maintained a strong relationship with the UK-based partners, despite the outcomes of the Brexit referendum and the eventual departure of the UK from the EU. With the recent elections and the landslide of the Labour Party, there is a great chance that there will be a turning of a page and a new era of constructive conversation about political, social and economic bilateral relations will follow. This is particularly relevant not only because of the strategic importance of the EU – UK partnership, which is crucial when approaching geopolitical context – but also because the fact that the negotiations on how to proceed with one another in the future are not concluded weighs heavily on people's lives. FEPS and partners (such as TASC) have been arguing for that, i.e., in the context of a recent project focused on Northern Ireland. To that end, FEPS believes in its role on these issues – having strong credentials and a foundation of over fifteen years of collaboration with British partners, and believing that the post-Brexit settlement remains at the core of the debate on the future of Europe and initiatives such as European Political Community (EPC) as well.

9. **DEFENDING AND DEEPENING DEMOCRACY** – analysing the main threats to democracy (far right politics, authoritarian tendencies, nationalism) inside but also outside the European Union – in order to find ways to foster participatory and representative democracy, with a specific focus on young people.

As outlined in the previous chapters, the assessment of the 2019-2024 European legislative period and the results of recent elections on all levels point to the fragility of European democracies, making the FAP 2025 priority three; *for a democratic and enlarged Europe* and FEPS democracy portfolio as relevant as ever.

The further far-right drift in the 2024 European Parliament elections was another indicator of how urgent it is to monitor the enemies of liberal democracy in Europe. Examining their strength and weaknesses to diminish their electoral gains and the impact of their exclusionary policy agenda and attempts to dismantle liberal democracy remains vital. Through an EU lens, this presents specific

challenges for European progressives. For the coming European Parliament mandate, it will be crucial for progressive forces to understand the numerically strengthened but divided far-right to minimise the harm they can do to existing and future progressive policy.

However, the problems with liberal democracy in Europe go deeper than just the threat of its enemies. The backdrop of poly-crises and the uncertainties it creates for individual citizens has created a sense of disempowerment. This sense is often heightened for the European Union, which remains further away and harder to understand than national or local politics. For progressives, it is about addressing the perceived inadequacies of political parties in meeting the needs of citizens and the low level of public trust in institutions. Social democrats must offer sustainable, long-term solutions to restore trust and promote active citizenship, countering the pessimism and disempowerment that often help elect those who preach hate and exclusion.

Based on a review process conducted jointly with FEPS stakeholders in 2024, the democracy portfolio will continue to focus on its two core pillars: defending democracy against threats (A) and improving democracy to adapt it to the challenges (B). Likewise, it will continue its cross-cutting priority of focusing on young people (C).

Building for progress: Impacting the EU's next youth strategy

Looking at the EU's mandate of 2025-2029, FEPS aims to improve its work on young people's issues. Most importantly, this time frame will see the drafting of a new European Commission youth strategy, which is supposed to run from 2028 to 2036. One core task of the FEPS work on young people in the coming years will be to influence this strategy by providing evidence demonstrating the needs and concerns of young people and highlighting the potential for progressive change.

Building on the tradition of previous FEPS youth surveys, the next edition aims to drastically increase its quality and impact. From a scientific point of view, it seeks to provide a longitudinal dimension to FEPS surveys, further establishing it as a key reference for young people's opinions on EU affairs. To increase policy impact, the survey aims to collaborate with renowned experts and FEPS members from the beginning on its different topical and country foci, ensuring that the questions asked and the discussion of the results will support ongoing European policy files and feed into the aforementioned draft process of the youth strategy.

Providing the Strategic Insights for a rejuvenated progressive movement

Europe is ageing, as is the social democratic movement.

One modest contribution of FEPS to rejuvenating the progressive movement could be creating a database of rigorous quantitative and qualitative studies. Such a web-based database would showcase youth research by progressive authors and think tanks covering central progressive issues (e.g., young people and housing). In an age of information overload, the platform would serve as a quick, curated reference point for current information concerning young people for progressive stakeholders in Brussels and the Member States. In the mid-term, it may also offer a platform for providing original insights, good practices and trends based on the collected data and studies.

Both youth-related endeavours outlined under issues 1 and 2 would involve a multiyear effort. One way to address this could be to consolidate resources and a large multi-partner consortium around the suggested platform and FEPS youth surveys, whether as part of a 'youth programme' or otherwise, to ensure sustainability.

Fighting the democratic backsliding and the far-right

In the upcoming European Parliament mandate, it is crucial for progressives to understand the divided but numerically strengthened far-right. Up-to-date analysis is essential to exploit their divisions and prevent cooperation between the EPP and far-right factions. This analysis should foremost be geared towards pragmatically protecting existing European progressive policies and enabling progressives to push forward new ideas. A promising approach could be to analyse successful (and unsuccessful) strategies in previous European Parliament mandates, as well as national and regional parliamentary experiences, and to develop advice for social democrats based on the current composition of the European Parliament.

In addition to the European arena, far-right parties increasingly enter government in national and regional governments. Hence, it becomes crucial to understand pathways for restoring democracy after their rule from a progressive perspective. This research is essential for countries like Poland, where democratic forces have regained power, those who hopefully will return to democracy one day, like Hungary, and those like Slovakia, where democratic standards are declining. By focusing on democratic recovery, this work can complement many existing studies on defending against democratic decline and offer practical strategies for progressives.

Nurturing Participatory Democracy

A diagnosis of democratic malaise in Europe often calls for increased participation. In 2025, we will partner with FEPS member TASC to explore what drives local engagement within and outside institutional frameworks. By understanding these motivations, we aim to develop policy recommendations to support structures and processes that enhance regional, national, and EU citizen engagement.

Citizens' assemblies are frequently cited as solutions to combat disempowerment and boost participation, as identified by the FAP as critical issues. However, the impact of such assemblies on attitudes and behaviour toward representative democracy remains under-researched. Key questions include whether participation in these formats encourages greater involvement in representative processes. A systematic analysis can show how participatory formats can strengthen, rather than replace, representative structures. This is crucial both for addressing democratic deficits at the European level and for progressive forces in regions where they are weak, offering a potential pathway for future engagement in party structures.

Ensuring Digital Democracy

The intersection of digital transformation and democracy is becoming increasingly important, offering opportunities and risks. In 2024, during a strategic seminar, FEPS stakeholders identified this topic as a new focus for the democracy portfolio.

Digital transformation can enhance democracy by broadening access to information on political participation and public services, fostering more just societies. However, it also introduces risks such as fake news, deep fakes, foreign interference, and the monopolistic power of social media platforms.

Developing a social-democratic vision for a more democratic digital transition and an adequate media eco-system is crucial. For FEPS, the first step is working with an existing expert network to identify areas that are both under-researched and potentially most beneficial for progressives during the 2024-2029 mandate. Subsequently, concrete projects should be initiated to translate these ideas into actionable research over the next five years, supporting legislation at the intersection of digitalisation and democracy and generating thought-provoking ideas. This issue should be tackled jointly by the digital and democracy portfolio.

10. **FUTURE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY** – evaluating the positioning of the progressive forces across the levels of governance, with a focus on their programmatic and strategic dilemmas, organisational difficulties and electoral appeal, governing capacities as well as abilities to remain constructive opposition and to bounce back from the crises.

The political map of Europe has been changing. The outcome of the European Elections leaves the social democratic family second in the European Parliament, within which position they carry immense responsibility as the strongest progressive voice in the so-called grand, pro-European coalition. This alliance is at best fragile, and it will require a continuous balancing act: to remain distinctive ideologically, while being part of cross-aisle cooperation; to prevent the emergence of other right-wing

majorities without being defensive; to use the significance and standing in the European Parliament, while supporting the work delivered by the socialist Commissioners and President of the Council. And amid that all, while not allowing the backlash on the core issue, keep on forging a new, appealing centre-left project for the future of Europe.

Social democrats have been facing diverse challenges on the national level as well. The proceeding fragmentation and radicalization of the political scene mean that it is not only difficult to hope for a landslide anywhere but also that in several elections, progressives haven't managed to keep the position of the first or second party. The conditions for conducting politics have changed across, requiring a different approach to programmatic issues, as also altered organisational, communication and campaign strategies. The erosion of the *traditional* politics goes in that sense beyond the earlier diagnosed crisis of *traditional parties*. And for many sister parties, the impact of it translated into the worst electoral results in history, sometimes even pushing them out of the national parliaments. And often to consider joining forces with others, accepting that from now on a different, confrontational type of politics will dominate and they have to merge (with greens, other left wing parties) to stand a chance within it. Though the situations differ from country to country, and there have also been recently few notable examples of the parties able to bounce back, 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 2025.

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 by crisis management in the face of harsh global developments, it is high time to reflect on what the core values mean nowadays and what sort of a compass they provide when responding to the crucial questions of contemporary times. Among these is the vision for Europe and the concept of state that can serve as a social contract in the 21st 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 in the context of left pluralism

The electoral tendencies of the last year 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 radicalization that leads to the rise of former fringe organizations. 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. Also, there is a need to rethink the strategy of coalitions, not only in the 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. This is also where the Next Left Lectures and Next Left country case studies can be particularly instructive

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 lines of political divisions. With the weakening of what used to be “core electorates” and growing volatility of voters, understanding the electoral dynamics require further research and analytical capacity. The question it should serve is the fundamental one: whom does social democracy include today and whom it can and should aspire to represent more, and how? To answer, FEPS and partners (here especially the Karl Renner Institute) will be able to rely on the launched in 2024 Next Left Progressive Pollsters Network.

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. Developing the capacity to conduct multilevel governance is a particular focus of this endeavour.

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 greatly. To that end, when looking at the map of Europe and identifying the places where social democrats have been struggling, the region of Central and Eastern Europe (with some exceptions) stands out. That is especially true important we remember how many governments were in the hands of the center-left at the moment of these countries' accession to the EU. With that in mind, in 2025 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. To do so, it will continue working with initiatives helping to forge understanding about regional specificities and boosting the capacity through projects such as the OPU (Open Progressive University) modules.