



**2026 Framework Activity Programme
of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies
(FEPS)**

Year 2026

**THE PROGRESSIVE COURSE FOR EUROPE
IN THE FACE
OF GRAND GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS**

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The FEPS (Foundation for European Progressive Studies) Framework Activity Programme (FAP) is a comprehensive document, which is adopted annually by the FEPS General Assembly (FEPS GA). It defines the overarching objectives for all the Foundation's activities in the 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 PES 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 in response to the European Parliament's call. Then it provides the guidelines for the FEPS Work Plan and for the subsequent calls for project proposals.

The FEPS Framework Activity Programme 2026 has been drafted following a procedure that was announced to the FEPS Bureau (30th January 2025). The steps leading to Draft 02 presented herewith included: initial discussion on the FAP 2026 priorities with the FEPS Scientific Council (4th April), exchange with the Members of the FEPS Bureau (10th April), the inputs from the FEPS Team Members (a special seminar on 20th May), as well as the unanimous endorsement from the FEPS Bureau Meeting (5^h June) and subsequent submission herewith to the FEPS General Assembly (27th June). Then, over the summer period, the draft endorsed by the FEPS GA was supplemented with specific subchapters and presented again, with a call for inputs both to the FEPS Members and to the FEPS Team. Then it was also further debated at the FEPS Policy Seminar (4th September 2025) and FEPS Team Meeting (9th September 2025), and finalised as a consolidated text ahead of the FEPS Bureau Meeting (21st September 2025), which is in charge of the final adoption. Approved, this document becomes the basis for the Grant Application for FEPS from the EP (submission date: end of September 2025).

I | FEPS FAP 2026: THE PROGRESSIVE COURSE FOR EUROPE IN THE FACE OF GRAND GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS

At the end of 2026, the European Union will approach the halfway point of its current legislative period. It will be a momentum of a review of how much has been accomplished since the 2024 elections, as well as a time for some alterations to occur among the so-called top positions. But it will also continue to be a time to reflect on the developmental trajectory of the EU, which must seek to redefine itself as a project of peace, prosperity and progress amid what seems to be a transition from US centered unipolarity towards a multipolar world order. Consequently, it will be a defining period when the new foundations will be further consolidated, as well as the narratives laid ahead of the next electoral cycle. And hence, it will be a particularly important crossroads for the progressives.

The results obtained last year enabled the S&D Group to remain the second largest force in the European Parliament. It continues striving to impact the EP, setting the boundaries and the benchmarks for cooperation with other pro-European and democratic forces across the defining moments. But the composition of that assembly has changed. It became more fragmented, with more MEPs elected on the wave of radicalisation of political views across Europe and the predominant shift towards the right of the political spectrum. These conditions prompt shifts in the traditional alliances, including the apparent weakening of the traditional grand coalition and the further alignment between the centre-right and hard right parties. They aim to dominate and determine the course of the integration's trajectory, which induces further changes in the nature of European politics. It is gradually seeing the culture of a consensus being replaced by the aptitude for confrontation. And the need for a dialogue is often being pushed aside amid aggressive political assaults. This, alongside the external context within which the global right also grows in power, hardens the conditions, especially since there has been no rebalancing to better connect the results of the European elections with the composition of the European Commission, within the College, as in the European Council, social democrats find themselves outnumbered. The stronghold remains the Presidency of the European Council, held by Antonio Costa.

The struggle remains to persevere, and to remain focused on the consolidation of the European Union and social democracy within that, and to deliver upon the promises to build another, more progressive, peaceful and prosperous Europe, against all these odds. Progressives are a movement that is committed to European integration, upholds its sense of responsibility for the Community, in the pursuit of solidarity, equality, democracy and peace. It is driven by the awareness that the political choices made today will have profound consequences on the world's and Union's future. But to continue on that consequently pursued mission, the centre left needs a breakthrough that would

enable its true reinvigoration and comeback. And while a political strategy clearly requires further thinking, its consolidation also largely depends on the ability to mobilise all the resources and coordinate, cooperate and construct a new coherent course within the progressive family. And this is the context in which FEPS finds itself, setting the guidelines for its activities for 2026.

Therefore, what must remain a core mission to seek to reimagine Europe, which is not only a response to the current dire and challenging times but also a project that shows confidence that the United Europe can continue being both a beacon of hope and a reassurance for the current and future generations. The European Union cannot be permitted to shrink in its ambitions and to fold into becoming a self-serving alliance. It shall not be allowed to silently transform from a project focused on peace, prosperity and welfare for all to one devoted to remilitarisation, narrowly defined security and warfare. For that, the vision for the next decades must lead to a Europe that is a reiteration of the core values of equality, solidarity, democracy and peace. That is externally a powerhouse with strength, authority and capacity to defend the values on which it has been built. And that is capable of succeeding in a task of solidifying Europe's role as a global player and an indispensable stakeholder in the debates about the future of international relations. And then, up to such Europe, it is the task to ensure that the world that would emerge after the persistent polycris and beyond the current escalation, aggressions and wars, would be a peaceful, sustainable and multilateral one. Such a Europe must internally have a strong democratic mandate and be able to rely on efficient decision-making processes, so that it is indeed again an answer to the aspirations and needs of all the citizens, many of whom struggle, feel disempowered and disregarded by the systems. Central to this vision is a Union that delivers on equality between people, among women and men, as well as non-binary - as gender equality is a driver for legitimacy, social cohesion and economic strength.

The necessity to build a viable, reassuring and hopeful alternative to the current course is obvious. And the efforts must start at the intellectual level, as well as within the realm of public debate and civic education. These are the key components to recognise as the developments point to polarisation and radicalisation, which means that the fight is not only to build alliance and connect with disenchanted – but to reverse the trends that prompt discrimination, xenophobia, misogyny and even lead to aggression and violence. To that end, understanding the nature of the political change and building on the power of constructive perseverance manifested by the progressive movement in these last full of hardship years, FEPS - as the European think tank of the family - carries an obligation to serve further as a space to connect and to help the progressive movement think long-term, strategise medium-term and analyse short-term. It will continue being a leading European laboratory of groundbreaking ideas, a connecting point for multidisciplinary networks, a learning space, a publisher of inspiring debating materials and an aula for key conversations.

In that spirit, the herewith presented FAP 2026 is drafted.

I.A The mission to propose an alternative to the current hegemonic thinking

Defending the legacy while proposing an alternative in a complex and shifting context

The previous legislative period was considered to be the most turbulent in the Communities' history till 2024. The Union was reminded that nothing is everlasting or should be taken for granted. The polycrisis, which has been unfolding on the wave of the persistent consequences of the great financial crash of 2007-2008, the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Russian invasion and the long-lasting war with Ukraine, the foreign interference into domestic policies and elections, among others, has served as painful evidence of it. The European Union and its members stood as one during most testing moments, successfully endorsing many of the needed solutions, such as *Next Generation EU*, with the Recovery and Resilience Facility as its centerpiece or the SURE mechanism. The recognition of the EU and its potential has grown, with surveys pointing to it reaching an unprecedented high level of support among the citizens. In spite of that, the internal centrifugal tendencies have continued to grow in strength

The subsequent elections, especially those held in the super electoral year 2024, have brought a decisive shift to the right. In several Member States, it has translated into the consolidation of the diverse ultraconservative and even extreme right, hostile to the EU values. On the level of the European Parliament, it has meant that they have amassed enough seats to constitute of three groups on the right side of the aisle from the EPP. And while Brexit may have been serving as a cautionary tale to those who previously had advocated complete secession for their respective countries, it has not been enough so far to tame their verbalised aspirations to reverse diverse aspects of the integration. Those in a position to do so have even succeeded in capturing the summits and aimed at blocking crucial decisions (as has been the case for the new package of sanctions for Russia) and advocating for the initiatives that would feed into a backlash (like the one on gender equality, and on women and LGBTQIA+). The above-mentioned unity among the Member States was no longer the principle abided by all.

This translates into the following two interconnected challenges. The first is that the grand political choice no longer divides those who want more and better Europe, and those who prefer the status quo, and speak only about full implementation of the treaties. It has become more complex. The picture is much more fragmented. Some wish to pull back and make the EU withdraw from some of its commitments. The achievements that they object to are often the ones that would ensure most of the

progress for all, and modernization. Examples are the common values and the Union's prerogative to act in defence of the rule of law, the EU Green Deal and the European Pillar of Social Rights. Then, there are still those, who represent a conservative approach, which doesn't aim at transforming the union. While they believe that it may preserve it, in fact, it is likely to cause a regression. Similarly, they still tend to – despite the evidence to the contrary – that European integration can be advanced with mechanisms that focus exclusively on the market and allow a pick-and-choose approach. Henceforth, the second challenge here is that the progressives face a backlash while striving to be the guardians of the numerous hard-fought achievements. They do their utmost to close the scope for actions that taken in the heat of the moment and sense of urgency, do not foresake the respect for treaties and diverse prerogatives of the democratically elected institutions. And from such a defensive position, within a fragmented and polarised political landscape, it is even more trying to promote an alternative, transformative vision.

Re-imagining the strong Union in a changing world

While the European political map has shifted considerably, so has the global one. The most prominent among them is President Trump's return to the White House following the November elections in the US. This has proven to have a profound impact on the world's politics already, as well as on the European Union. It's whose geostrategic orientation has for decades been connected with the transatlantic doctrines, the common priorities within the UN and the cooperation within such formats as NATO. The change in the leadership in the US had not been unanticipated, but it still arrived as vastly disturbing news and reinforced the notion that contemporary politics in itself is governed by very different rules and no longer creates an order that Western Europe and North America have grown accustomed to following since the post-World War II era. Because of unilateralism and unpredictability on one hand, and on the other because of the boldness of the political announcements and moves (which are not subject to the further scrutiny and often also quickly reversed) of the new administration, the EU has been often placed in a position of having to do a balancing act.

This has meant responding adequately but without allowing escalations, as it would have been the case if the Union had immediately assumed the trade war and would have moved to the mechanisms such as anti-coercion. The EU has acted responsibly, not only when it comes to the discussion on tariffs, but also on the nontariff barriers. The strategic question for the European Union is how to remain standing tall in defence of its values and model, as well as how to continue pursuing its vision of the new world order and the responsibilities that the international community has – be it amid the war in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza, the further eruption of conflicts in the Middle East, or when it comes to fulfilling the historical promises in the field of multilateralism, human rights, development policies and humanitarian aid. The EU must strive indeed to liberate itself from being cornered by disruptive

announcements from Washington and instead pursue the new alliances, via trade agreements based on honest and just cooperation, a common understanding of the global agenda and respect for international laws. It must act to ensure that the European Strategic Autonomy is a living and meaningful concept, by using its full toolbox. It must also seek new partnerships to diversify among its strategic allies and diminish threatening dependencies.

The notion that there is a need for the EU to rethink its standing is particularly eminent also if to take the dynamics of the transatlantic relations against the larger geopolitical matrix. While the EU was negotiating its trade accord with the US, and while it was striving to be part of the Washington talks regarding the future of Ukraine, the other global powers were gathering in China. From this perspective, the multipolar order is emerging with different features than once foreseen by Europeans, relying on different rules to deliver peaceful coexistence. While the analysts speak about the rise of global authoritarianism and revival of imperial thinking among several of the large countries, the EU must be prepared not only to answer how it sees itself amid those processes and what tools it has at its disposal, but also not to forsake the principles it has always been committed to as a Community. The European Progressives must move to a fighting mode and lead the fight for the European model.

Thinking beyond the current brackets that often offer false choices

Framing an understanding that it is not a moment to retreat, but to reinforce the European Union globally, requires further efforts to reimagine the new world with an outlook that goes far beyond the current news cycle. It also requires preserving the internationalist spirit, avoiding being captured by the false choices that the right wing imposes nowadays. Because forging the Union as a powerhouse in the new era should never be boiled down to a choice between welfare and warfare. Because the term “security” cannot be narrowly defined as a military question. And because, however the new chapter of globalisation will look like, the world will remain tightly interconnected.

Proposing a different, progressive understanding of the circumstances may also be liberating in another context. The above-described return of President Trump, as well as the overwhelming presence of the right-wing radicals and ultra-conservative politicians at the inauguration, painted a picture of a radical right acting united on a global scale and being more prolific and organised than one could expect. This, in conjunction with the hardening of other world powers, may feel particularly daunting. Especially that the hard transnational right electoral gains follow aggressive campaigns, amid which they seem not to be stopped, neither by having been convicted and having caused the scandal, nor by resorting to inadmissible, combative and disrespectful behaviours towards their political opponents. They appear to be bold and strong, unmoved by circumstances, mobilising those who feel striving, particularly upset or even abandoned by the system.

What makes this global, prolific coordination of the radical right further perilous is the fact that it is multifaceted (including parties, movements, think tanks and diverse, also religious, organisations – often backed by vast private capital) and that it has achieved tight relations with business, including here especially some of the social media oligarchs. This tops their capacities with a power to impact the dynamics of politics beyond the traditional scope of influence that any party has ever enjoyed. Thanks to the alliance with stakeholders of the so far still under-regulated digital capitalism, they are in a position to create bubbles, to spread their false news, influence public opinion and even change the course of the national elections. These developments proceed at a high pace and further interfere with the nature of politics. It was already under pressure with the phenomenon of mediatisation and 24h media cycle. At the same time, now it has succumbed to social-mediatisation and communication practices that are neither subjected to public scrutiny nor required to be conducted concerning the rules of democratic, pluralist societies. And it all makes many in the EU question whether it is too late to assume any control. While European social democrats are asking this themselves, they are often intimidated by the ultraconservatives and radicals, who accuse them of trying to limit the right to free speech. But the real question here is, how to make modern democracies in their entirety resilient. And how to make the digital sphere be ruled by the same principles of pluralism, respect and inclusivity.

Providing a sense of security and hope

To that end, the regulation of a market—digital or other—should not be seen through any other prism than the criteria of putting it at the service of humanity and as instrumental to providing equal opportunities, freedom from discrimination or oppression, and social progress for all. And that is yet another part of the mission of articulating the real choices nowadays.

The European Union of the last two mandates has been the one that had to face historical moments, and while uniting the Members to pass the dire tests, it saw some crucial progress being achieved. It should not, therefore, be astonishing to read the results of the surveys already quoted earlier, which show that the support for the EU is at a record high level. This is also why there is an urgent need to build on these credentials and dare propose an alternative vision. It should neither anchor in a nostalgia suggesting that one can come back to some apparently glorious past of the integration process, nor should it argue that the EU can persevere just by upholding what it has managed to become.

Evidently, when change is perpetual, fast and apparent, and so often has brought hardship and insecurities, it is hard to argue in favour and convince citizens of yet another transition into something different, unknown. Even more so, when one speaks of a vision for a mid- and long-term future, which

is not always tangible. However, societies evolve, and new generations carry with them new dreams. The demands to address climate crisis and adjust the production-consumption model only accelerate, the demand for public goods and services grows (especially amid of the unresolved cost of living crises), and the relations within the world of work alter, as well as the way people define themselves in relations to the jobs they have.

As time passes, the only way to be able to protect and empower citizens truly is to understand the changes of the transformations, discuss alternatives and anticipate the future to come. And here again, there would be a need to move from the false choice that liberalises and commodifies the public sector, or deregulates the economy and labour market. The competitiveness of the EU depends on the Union's seriousness in upholding its values, standards and citizens' rights as enshrined in the European Social Model. The word "social" has been dropped and replaced by "preparedness" in the current legislative period already, but that should not be seen as the end of it. Instead, progressives must be the ones to stand up for the core principles of the Social Europe, which their predecessors forged as a concept in the 1970s and which has always been their prior aim for European integration. They must break from the limitations of thinking along austerity principles and showcase that European welfare systems are affordable, but also are an investment in the future that will see greater return in more equal, fairer, cohesive and integrated societies.

Standing ready to serve as a European political foundation and a progressive think tank

Those four points are just exemplary of the fact that ahead of the midterm in 2026 and amid of the ongoing unprecedented developments, the progressive movement must arrive prepared and confident, offering credible choices, which, if met – can redirect the European Union to a coherent, progressive course enabling the EU not only to persevere, but reemerge better and stronger from these turbulent times. FEPS has been working tirelessly to examine all the above-mentioned trends across its 10 thematic fields in these past years, as well as conducting an impressive volume of activities that would allow important, interdisciplinary conversations about alternative scenarios for Europe within the Union and beyond its borders. 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*"). It has been very active as the UN ECOSOC consultative member, taking part in the UN Future Summit in 2024 and in the Second UN Summit for Social Development in 2025 (with its series of high-level conferences "United for..."). And it has been the only European Union's Foundation to make officially part of the G20 process within the stream of the civil society organisations. What is more, in partnership with Members as well as 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* and many other areas. With these credentials and the amassed expertise and networks, it stands ready to be the connecting point. It will continue taking its responsibilities to deliver with a passionate commitment, striving to provide further insightful studies, pioneering ideas and space for debates. To add, amid these difficult times, it will also serve as an important hub for members, as well as for academics, journalists and civil society experts, who find themselves under so much pressure amid the emergence of the new regimes.

I.B State of the centre-left in Europe

As outlined, the Progressive family shares a critical diagnosis about the state of the world and European affairs, the evaluation of which is completed in a constructive spirit that serves as a motivational drive. The centre-left is proud of how it has contributed to the Union's developments, and especially now, in these testing times that are calling for an alternative, shall uphold a belief that a better, fairer, peaceful and prosperous Europe is possible. This is underpinned by persisting hope, as much as it is by the sense of responsibility, assuming which, however, will require the progressive movement to refound and reinvigorate itself. On that path, FEPS with its long-term, prolific Programme of the Next Left (established in cooperation with the Karl Renner Institut in 2009 and coordinated by Ania Skrzypek), as well as other initiatives, especially in the Thematic Field 10 ("Renewal of social democracy"), stands ready to offer instructive and inspiring inputs.

Understanding the electoral results and their consequences

There are different ways to assess the scope of the challenge that the progressive movement finds itself with. One can look at the results of the recent national elections, which directly point to the fact that there is a very uneven capacity of the social democratic parties in Europe. Especially with the Central and Eastern, and Eastern Europe, the sister parties have been struggling and sometimes even failing to cross the electoral threshold. It is no longer possible to assume that across the Union, the centre left will end the electoral race being either the party of the government or the main force in the opposition. The social democracy should engage the movement in thinking about how it must position itself to remain determinant in the political developments in these new, diversified, often fragmented and polarised constellations. In any case, in face of a coordinated radical right, the European Progressives should aim at leading the broader coalition, which needs to be built up to counter and to defeat it.

While it may sound consequential to the polls and results that the parties are noting, the task ahead is not just about finding a way to reverse the numbers. The real task requires rethinking the movement's mission. And then, subsequently to that, how to effectively reorganise the priorities and redefine the

delivery criteria. The latter has been taken by the parties of the centre left as a synonym of conducting politics responsibly, becoming a certain straightjacket, and often pushing parties into defensive positions of arguing what cannot be done. This has become a vulnerability, especially when contrasted with the radical right populist forces, which have no remorse in promising even the most improbable or impossible. The argument here is not to copy or compete, but to meet their arrogance and boldness with a daring vision that goes beyond a managerial political approach, which remains coherent with social democratic principles.

The new political environment requires social democrats to be in a perpetual search for other strategic allies from among the stakeholders. For those traditional parties that have not only been part of the system, but have also been actively co-shaped it – this is a perceptual, psychological, as well as cultural change. In diverse national contexts, it may require adapted strategies, especially seeing that in some Member States, it is a block-type of politics that emerges slowly, prompting the creation of two opposing camps, and elsewhere, social democrats may wish to find paths to merge with other political parties. On the EU level, it must additionally help find a way between trying to hold onto a coordination among the democratic forces on one hand, and on the other not allowing oneself to be seen as disposable or even hostage to the potential coalitions between the right and radical right. Ever since the beginning of the legislative period 2024 – 2029, it has been a challenge.

Bridging beyond gaps and appealing to new electoral groups

Evidently, the falling numbers result from the combination of factors, key among them are the shifts of entire electoral groups. Progressives may have for too long been holding onto, and hoping for the category of the core voters to remain valid, whereby they now often see the groups that they would consider to be their own supporters by default (because of the age, gender, education, occupation, average income etc. of the cohorts) moving to vote the forces on the opposite side of the aisle. In analysing these trends, much energy has been devoted to a search for the reasons underpinning these shifts, with a tendency to point to the mistakes of the past. But while the voters may have been disillusioned with diverse political choices or repulsed by some of the past mistakes, the primary motivation for them to vote now is the situation at hand and the credibility of the promises that the candidates make.

Here, the progressives must find in themselves the courage to look more and speak more about the future. It is not enough to recognise the old faults, if one does not show that one has learnt and emerged improved from them. To be able to present themselves as a force that is traditional and hence predictable, yet understands its past in a way that allows it to take charge of the future will also require restoring the movement's confidence in itself. Progressives must consolidate and start believing again

in the potential, abilities and competences that they have (especially in the prior field of socio-economic policies) and elevate themselves from the self-imposed limitations. Ever since the financial crisis in 2007-2008 and amid the ongoing polycrisis, they tend to think more about what is impossible and what needs to be kept safe at a minimum, which falls short in terms of truly responding to people's changed aspirations and is not enough to capture young people's imaginations, minds and hearts. Their updated, modernised and bold vision of a Social Europe for all is definitely part of an answer.

Finding a way forward in amid new political dynamics

And in looking forward, there must be an understanding that the politics have changed, that the rules of democracy and pluralism that have been widely abided by in the past are now under pressure. In a situation in which every fourth and in some countries every third even vote goes to the right-wing radical and extremist parties, progressives must find the way to preserve their nature as a democratic force on one hand, and on the other not to be seen as a party of the dysfunctional system that under the label of democracy defender aims at limiting access to it and pluralism within it. Democratic resilience does not come from disregard, but from the ability of the democratic forces to prove that there are credible alternatives that form inclusive political platforms. And in order to offer one, social democrats should review their very own programmatic principles, seek a modern translation of theirs into the policy principle and herewith reclaim such core values as empowerment and freedom, as well as answer themselves a simple and yet a complex question, whom they wish to represent and what that means for hierarchy of the issues they wish to put up front.

To that end, while for sister parties across Europe and on the EU level the likely course of action will be to state that they feel most affinity with the world of labour and this is the constituency that they wish to be standing for first, they must also challenge themselves to see that the concept of work, what it means for the employees and workers, as well as in how far it remains the first point of self-identification for the citizens across Europe, has changed. There are growing divides not only between those, whose jobs are seen as the occupations of the past, and those who are taking the jobs that will remain vital in the next stage of the digital global capitalism. There are deep divides also between those who have diverse types of contracts; those who can sustain themselves with their own labour and those who additionally need to rely on the welfare system to provide; those who can count on career prospects and those who seem most volatile. The traditional social democracy has always been focused on forging an alliance between what they called the lower and middle classes, but in the contemporary reality, they require a more nuanced approach which will allow them to bridge beyond diverse divides on one hand, and on the other tame the tendency to speak in nostalgic terms and instead show how that regardless of transformation they remain the only force truly committed to ensuring quality employment, equality at work place and social justice for all.

Becoming a thriving movement

And that leads to another set of preoccupations that progressives should consider. The professionalisation of politics has implied a specific organisational model for the parties that wanted to succeed in effective and smart communication styles, as well as in hitting all the benchmarks suggested by the opinion polls when it comes to drafting attractive electoral platforms. Moving to that business model with partial outsourcing of the functions of a party, they became organisations of dense and often closed structures. As a result, they have not been able to anticipate fully on the changing patterns of political communication and participation. This is a serious matter that will require further thinking and intersectoral deliberations in an attempt not only to seek the progressive movement's reinvigoration through the policies that would make it more open, more inclusive and more democratic internally, but also to contribute with the proposals on revising the party participatory democracy as a contribution to making democracy *sensu largo* more resilient in the future.

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. Consequently, the ambition of FEPS is to become the leading institute when it comes to progressive thinking about the future of the EU.

In 2026, **FEPS can already rely on 76 members:** 40 full, 31 observers, and 5 ex-officio ones. There are also several applications that are currently being considered to ensure that the membership covers the entire geographical area of the European Union, as well as there are efforts made to ensure that FEPS can be fully operational on the entire of the Union's territory – if and when the long awaited enlargement takes place. 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 6 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 (which in 2025 will have been reformed), 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 2026 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.

As a modern progressive European think tank, FEPS sees its mission as both developing diverse initiatives and leading by example. It resonates in continuous commitment to the core values such as equality, diversity and inclusion. These are rooted in the FEPS Statutes, which define governing and working methods, as well as the organisation's culture and approach to human resources practices. Herewith, FEPS remains committed to inclusive programming (integrating gender mainstreaming and diversity perspective, as well as aiming at intersectional approach across the activities), equal representation (across all the initiatives and publications, as pledged while signing to Brussels Binder), respectful and inclusive communication (promoting gender sensitive language, while challenging discrimination and fighting stereotypes), building further capacity, actively involving the representatives of the more vulnerable social groups and raise awareness aimed at creating fairer, more cohesive and egalitarian societies.

In that spirit, the FAP 2026 will be the fifth 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 2026, to forge more cooperation among the members and hence after enhance the output in the spirit of “less is more”.

II | MISSION HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2026: TO BE INSPIRING, INSTRUCTIVE, AND IMPACTFUL

With the ambition to help prepare the progressive family to arrive at the mid-term of the European legislative period prepared, when it comes to both ability and credibility in offering Europeans alternative choices – FEPS sees its mission in the 2026 as defined by an aspiration to remain intellectually inspiring, strategically instructive and both academically and politically impactful.

The implication of that is that FEPS FAP 2026 is guided by a readiness to accelerate in attempts to reach scholarly excellence, raise the political relevance of the initiatives, communicate even more effectively, as well as boost the European dimension across the fields that constitute the building blocks of the FEPS Work Plan. It also means that FEPS will continue with the initiatives that comprise its current strong credentials, while looking at the ways to converge and cluster within, while at the same time making space for the extension of the network and further enhanced cooperation with the stakeholders within the Progressive family, as well as within carefully selected strategic partnerships.

Therefore, while annually FEPS is proud to carry out more than 100 diverse projects, as well as publish and broadcast intensively, it also aims to deliver all these coherently, so it pays particular attention to the selection of the **three core annual priorities**. Their role is to serve as a compass, transcending across the 10 thematic fields, training and communication. They stand for a credo reflecting FEPS' understanding of what should be mid- and long-term debates within the progressive movement, which areas it believes it can deliver innovation and boost capacity, and, also, they describe the organization's strategic orientation for the 12 months to come. To that end, the selection of these priorities is done with the regard to the guiding documents of the sister organisations – and especially here including the PES Berlin and Malaga Declarations, as also the PES Manifesto adopted in Rome in 2024 and the documents drafted in preparations of the PES Congress of Ideas in Amsterdam in autumn 2025, alongside the strategic documents of the S&D and PES in CoR, as well as focal points articulated by YES, PES Women, ESO and RainbowRose Network.

In that spirit, the three priorities for 2026 have been chosen to be:

1) For a Stronger, Strategically Autonomous and Cooperative 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, prosperity and a new multilateral global deal

2) For a Recovered, Resilient and Transformative Social Europe

Paving the way to a new European development model by equipping it with policy instruments to fight inequalities and ensure wellbeing as well as social progress for all through its economic, fiscal, labour, care, 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.

Against the background of the analyses provided in Chapter I of the FEPS FAP 2026, these priorities translate into the following focus for the FEPS initiatives in 2026.

II A. For a Stronger, Strategically Autonomous and Cooperative 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

This annual priority is placed as the first one among the three. Although they are meant to mutually complement each other, the positioning of the priority “For a Stronger, Strategically Autonomous and Cooperative Europe” on the top is an expression of an understanding how crucial the geopolitical context has become and herewith how important it is that the EU is not inward looking, but aspires to be a powerhouse that helps shaping a new multilateral global order. It stands for commitment to internationalism and the sense of responsibility to prove yet again that another, peaceful, more sustainable world is possible. Amid of an emerging new global order, the European Progressives need to strengthen their capacity to make global politics. FEPS and progressive think-tanks also need to better coordinate themselves in this this direction.

For FEPS, this understanding further translates into a focus on several issues. To start with, it requires re-examining the path that could lead to the reform and reinvigoration of the international frameworks. A primary example among them is the UN system, which, within 2024 UN Summit for the Future, the CSW (UN Commission on the Status of Women), the UN Conference for financing of development in Sevilla in 2025, has already offered essential space for much-needed debates. FEPS has been actively participating in these benefits from the UN ECOSOC consultative status, and will continue playing a role, also in the COP30 in Brasil, as well as in the UN Summits for social development

and digital governance and all the ongoing work to implement UN Pact for the Future adopted in 2024. FEPS will be there acting in coordination with the other sister organisations, here especially Socialist International and Progressive Alliance, which recently decided to develop a global network of think-tanks. Beyond the re-empowerment and the institutional reform, the goal will remain to keep advocating and contributing to the delivery by the EU upon its historical commitments such as Sustainable Development Goals, climate agreements and the Beijing plus 25 – to name just a few as an example. And FEPS herewith will also promote a feminist approach to the EU external action, feeding into the forthcoming EU Gender Action Plan IV (GAP IV), ensuring that gender equality, women's empowerment and LGBTQIA+ inclusion remain central to Europe's multilateral agenda.

Furthermore, FEPS will intensify its work regarding geoeconomics. Part of that agenda will include examining the paths to strengthen the European Strategic Autonomy by trimming down the perilous dependencies in the context of critical and raw materials trade – while refraining from extractive practices and promoting the fair co-benefiting of resources for producing countries. But equally important to that will be work that will help see how WTO could reinvent itself amid what has the signs of developing into a full-fledged global trade war, as well as the efforts that may help reimagine some of the EU relations with third parties and the scope of the new partnership agreements. Here, the role of FEPS as an actor able to deliver in the sphere of informal global diplomacy will most likely be particularly valuable. As well as its capacity to bring together diverse groups of experts into a community of like-minded to work together on relations of pivotal importance, such as i.e. EU – Mercosur or EU–African ones.

To that end, while the polycrisis has served for many countries already as an explanation to the cuts they undertook in their spending on aid and development, it is particularly relevant that FEPS remains committed to a progressive global agenda. It is not only about the European Union's responsibility for the past and the timeless principles of international solidarity, but it is also about understanding that the current confrontational and marked by remilitarisation era will take a toll on those already vulnerable. That is also why further efforts to FEPS that can help revise from the progressive angle the definition and the guarantees of everyone's right to access global public goods and rights will be particularly timely. Equally to the reflection on state and the future of humanitarian laws, on which expertise FEPS would like to add to its repository of competences. The latter would also be an important addition to the pivotal work that FEPS has been doing and is determined to continue focusing on the issue of migration (including here the Migration and Asylum Pact implementation).

Evidently, the global context *sensu largo*, rearmament and escalation of the conflicts have also already prompted the EU to refocus on its defence capabilities. But whereas the other political forces

understand these in a narrow way, FEPS will continue supporting the Progressive family in their efforts to ensure that the term “security” is defined more broadly. With that more prolific understanding, FEPS will work to continue being a space for an exchange regarding the future of the Defence Union, the herewith connected investments in R&D, rules for procurement, as well as the path towards setting the EU – NATO relations anew. Yet again, when focusing on the challenge to safeguard, preserve and protect – the FEPS understanding is that there is a need to go beyond conventional issues, connecting the issue of resilience with the questions of digital autonomy, democratic shield and cybersecurity.

Finally, while the changes within the geopolitical context have prompted many decisions that were taken in the heat of the moment and have had a character of responses, FEPS believes that they also may have given impetus to the diverse processes that have been dormant or stagnant for different reasons. In that spirit, FEPS sees that there may be an opportunity to boost further the work that it has been delivering on the Western Balkans and regarding the future of the EU enlargement. Its intention remains to enlarge the scope and add further initiatives that will help rethink the Eastern Partnership. And last but not least, having in mind the breakthrough that took place in May 2025 by opening a new chapter of the EU – UK relationship, FEPS intends to continue being a European political foundation with knowledge about these from before Brexit and with much expertise to assist the thematic dialogues and annual summits that are to follow. This all is exemplifying FEPS standpoint that as much as the EU should continue pursuing the paradigm of diversified partnerships on the international level, FEPS as the EU level political foundation should apply the same principles in its work that is defined by a theme ‘FEPS Diplomacy’ and through contacts in civil society connect with stakeholders in the US, Latin America and Africa, to name some.

II. B For a Recovered, Resilient and Transformative Social Europe

Paving the way to a new European development model by equipping it with policy instruments to fight inequalities and ensure well-being plus 25 being as well as social progress for all through its economic, fiscal, labour, care, social, gender, green and digital policies

This annual priority reflects the ambition of FEPS as a European think tank to be a leader and a strong reference point on the issues that remain at the core of the progressively defined Social Europe. The challenge is not only in further raising the profile of the organisation and disseminating much of the excellent expertise that has been amassed throughout the years. It is also about doing that in a way that, despite the social agenda being lower in the current Commission, the themes are upheld as central to every and any debate about the future of Europe. That is especially in such focus moments as the State of the European Union address, as well as the launch of the subsequent EU presidencies.

Consequently, FEPS aspires to continue with its pioneering thinking about the European economy, its production and consumption model. It intends to play an important role in furthering the debates that evolved following the publication of the two reports (by Mario Draghi and by Enrico Letta, respectively), and it will further engage (with its Progressive Economists Network and others) in research pertaining to questions of European competitiveness and crucial investments, and their social and environmental impacts. In that spirit, it intends to deepen the conversation about the new clean industrial deal.

Furthermore, following the work that has already been completed to explore the financial underpinning of the European economic model for the future, FEPS intends to carry on with the research and exchanges that will deepen the understanding on potential future trajectories for the European Fiscal and Capital Union. These will be complementary to the expertise, which will further be provided to help consolidate and reinforce a progressive stance in the run-up to the negotiations leading to the new EU budget, as well as the progressive stance in the negotiations for the new Multiannual Financial Framework. On the latter, already in 2025 FEPS has published a dossier with the early assessment, but the work will continue both when it comes the socio-economic, as well as political implications of the new MFF. This may prove particularly crucial in 2026, considering the emerging disagreement and potential revived split between those considered more frugal and the others.

As the priority points to recovery and resilience, FEPS believes that it is essential to further pursue the research aimed at finding more answers as to how to fight against inequalities, here also including gender based inequalities, poverty, exclusion and disempowerment. The building blocks of the plan include projects that will be devoted to the workers' rights and the questions on how to provide quality and meaningful employment for all, as well as the initiatives that will help deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights, the new EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the first-ever Affordable Housing Plan. It will foster a deeper understanding on how to provide public services for all and across all territories. It will pay particular attention to the provision of universal healthcare, including building on the growing attention to mental health. And will encompass efforts aimed at identifying further strategies to close gender pay, care and pension gaps, as well as providing investments in the care economy. The debate on the future of education shall be explored. Last but not least, the social dimension of the next MFF will remain a central point of attention with a particular focus on gender-responsive budgeting.

These socio-economic priorities naturally connect with the position FEPS to consider climate action and environmental protection as key issues, both at the European and international levels. The FEPS –

FES Climate programme has grown to be stable, prolific and multifaceted. Here, the focal points for 2026 will certainly include the already mentioned implementation of the Clean Industrial Deal, regional just transitions, Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships, and international climate negotiations. Filling an important gap, new research will be developed in the context of the upcoming European Climate Adaptation Plan. The issue of the just transition in the context of the Western Balkans and their accession shall also receive special attention. And last but not least, what has not yet been a priority on the FEPS agenda, but shall be considered as an important addition, is the set of issues that connect the fight against climate change with the questions about the future of agriculture, food security and the agenda for restoration.

Additionally, the term ‘transformative’ within this priority will also stand for FEPS engagement with the theme of Digital Union. Here, as well, FEPS has been successfully conducting a programme in cooperation, particularly with the partnering organisations from the north. While the repository of the ideas (in a form of publications, podcasts and meeting reports) remain rich, there is a strong believe that beyond the work on legislative pieces such as Digital Services Act and Digital Market Act (of which full implementation is of a strategic importance in the contemporary reality), FEPS will also strive to popularise the debate on the state and future of digital capitalism, as well as on the AI Development Act. Herewith, it raises awareness and boosts the movement’s capacity to further frame and lead that process. This is necessary to build a better popular understanding and hence support for the ideas connected with the new European industrial model, the need to defend the European digital sovereignty and think ahead about building own EU-regulated platforms.

II. C For a Democratic and Enlarged European Union

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.

This third annual priority defines the mission of FEPS, as a European political foundation and a progressive think tank, but even more so as a stakeholder contributing and directly or indirectly shaping the European public sphere by its inputs. Understanding well the threat that comes from the clash of the ideals and ideas on the global level, the prolific character of the international radical right, as well as the vulnerability of the existing institutional systems and regrettable developments within the societies (of which symptoms are, among the others gender backlash, xenophobia, racism, as well

as promptness to aggression and violence) – FEPS herewith commits itself to do all it its power to help change trends and herewith contribute to a democratic revival.

To start with, 2025 marks two decades since the European Union announced its Plan D – in response to the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in two referenda and to the political crisis that the EU experienced in the aftermath. The understanding of how much time has passed since, how much the Union has grown and changed, and how much more it is required to act leads to an understanding that the Treaty changes must be seen as imminent. FEPS, having worked on this issue and having been arguing for both the enlargement and deepening to take place within the current mandate, is determined to seek a revival of the intention to reform the institutional construct by pursuing further exchanges between stakeholders from across the levels of governance. And in order to make sure that the efforts are not hijacked by Eurosceptic and anti-European forces, FEPS sees its role in raising awareness within different audiences about the choices and modalities.

Subsequently, the further rise of the radical, ultraconservative and extreme right is anticipated with anxiety as they are seen as forces that act to discredit and undermine the democratic system. The progressive movement must therefore devise strategies to counteract these tendencies and protect against the backlash. Part of that mission will be accomplished by FEPS projects that look into the anatomy of the emergence of these forces, the demographic profile of their voters and the patterns that they follow in their actions. But the objective is bigger than just halting the radical right. It is about reviving our democracies and making them resilient. Hence, FEPS is determined to complement these efforts with further research regarding the European core values, what they should translate to in order to be tangible and how the EU can be more effective in safeguarding them. This is expected to become an initiative with a multifaceted approach, enabling FEPS to engage with the trade unions, civil society organisations, and media and culture sector representatives. And helping to provide a more nuanced, in-depth understanding is what is needed to coin an effective strategy that will address democratic deficits and civic disempowerment across the spheres of human activities. Going beyond the political aspects, this means reconnecting FEPS with the conversations about, i.e., European Democracy Shield, democracy at the workplace and empowerment of the youth.

As it has already been referred to before, the shift in electoral patterns is connected in many cases with the perception that the system (and elites) failed and no longer represent the citizens, who then go and vote for forces opposing it. This is a part of a negative spiral, which brings along the political and cultural backlash observed across the continent. The capacity to stop it and turn the gears depends on the ability to understand fully sociological and demographic processes, which is a lesson FEPS draws with a clear implication for focusing the implementation of the third priority on the question of gender

equality, women's rights and LGBTQIA+ rights. Though the consistent efforts have already endowed FEPS with an impressive repository of ideas, amid the developments it is clear that here also the commitment to be a feminist organisation means undertaking responsibility to help shape the new EU Gender Equality Strategy post-2025. This commitment includes strengthening women's and LGBTQIA+ rights and avenues enabling their political participation, as well as must be a solid stepping stone also in the fight to further protect women and minority voices in politics from harassment and violence;

To that end, this particular priority also represents a commitment to a vision of a fair and inclusive society. In order to build one, it is essential to find ways to connect diverse groups and FEPS believes that among its tasks for 2026 shall be enhancing cooperation with youth, youth representatives and gearing further projects focused on the young cohorts. These can be approached from diverse angles, some of which FEPS has already been working on (such as intergenerational solidarity or youth employment), and some that it would like to start developing (which can be exemplified by an intention to step up efforts in the field of education and civic education). This enhancement (and innovation) can be of further strategic importance, helping FEPS to raise its profile as a think tank connected and having expertise on the youth policies, which would be additionally timely, as they for the first time also constitute a scope of a separate portfolio of the EU Commissioner.

II.D FEPS desired impact for the 3 priorities

The three 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 the 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 well as 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 2026 are:

1. **EUROPE IN THE WORLD** – focusing on the EU’s role in striving for peace and development in a new multipolar global order, as well as bilateral relations with strategic partners in diverse formats of alliances, partnerships and neighbourhood policies. Contributing to the development of a stronger security and defence dimension of the EU and a geoeconomic analysis of the new global reality.
2. **MIGRATION** – informing and sustaining a fair debate on asylum and migration, prioritising the monitoring of the Pact on Migration and Asylum’s implementation and the development of integration and labour policies that actively build social cohesion; defining the features of an efficient and humane migration management; developing fair and transparent relations with the countries of origin and transit; as well as analysing the vital link between Europe’s demographic challenges and migration dynamics.
3. **SOCIAL EUROPE** – monitoring the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as the creation of the EU’s Affordable Housing Plan and Anti-Poverty Strategy, ensuring the social dimension of the next Multiannual Financial Framework, and developing new ideas related to the concept of work and quality jobs as well as in the field of healthcare, wellbeing, education and provision of public services.
4. **ECONOMY AND FINANCE** – designing a resilient and sustainable economic development model, to forge policy proposals towards a job-rich growth through a robust European industrial policy as well as the EU fiscal capacity; advocating fair taxation to support the innovative, fair, competitive and productive economy, and scaling up 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, as well as strategic partnerships such as the one with the UK
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.

And the more detailed description of the guidelines agreed for the 10 Thematic Fields in accordance to the 3 Key Annual Priorities can be found in the Annex 1 of this document.

III. B FEPS training – consolidating a FEPS 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* already by the beginning of 2026. 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 have continued in 2025, in cooperation with S&D Group and FMS, whereby OPU has developed a special module on Progressive Ukraine.

FEPS Annual Autumn Academy | Brussels, Belgium | September / October 2026

Following the successful launch of this initiative in 2019 and a very encouraging feedback from the Members (as shared in the evaluation right after and in the context of the survey on the new FEPS Training Strategy), as also a pioneering online edition in 2020 and the inventive hybrid version in 2021, FEPS is planning to keep the FEPS Annual Autumn Academy (AAA) as a flagship initiative of the consolidated FEPS Training Strategy, 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, in principle it will always include a set of well-established and effective methods. In the schedule that means including: lecture by prominent personalities, direct exchanges with European leaders (Special Guests), discussions on priority topics with the European stakeholders, as also meeting with potential progressive allies and partners, such as the Party of European Socialists and PES Women, the S&D Group in the European Parliament, PES Group at the Committee of Regions, Young European Socialists, and Rainbow Rose, among others. The AAA will continue providing thematic and country case studies focused workshops, introduction to best practices of advocacy and public communication, as also spaces for political creativity. It will continue 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 2026. 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 Estonia.

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 just published the outcomes of the 8th cycles (6 policy papers) and finalised the recruitment of the 9th cycle, which will continue and end in 2025. This means that 2026 will be devoted to both the dissemination of the results, as well as to the recruitment of new participants who will form the 10th jubilee cycle.

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 2026.

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, as well as Switzerland. The effort is to continue, while new elements are being brought in place to ensure the greater coordination among the academies and even greater emphasis on using these as vehicles to share the knowledge about the European Union?.

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 Mário 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.

FEPS Primers | Throughout the year

Following the success of the first primers (educational books on the politics and policies of the European Union), FEPS is hoping to pursue next editions within the scope of the FEPS Training Programme.

All the aspects of the Training Programme will continue being conducted with respect of the principles of equality, inclusivity and respect, paying particular attention to ensuring diversity, equal access and representativeness among themes, trainers and lecturers, as well as participants.

III.C FEPS consultancy

FEPS has 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. An important example of that has been the work done in preparation of the Progressive Programme for the European Commission. 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 over sixteen years)**. By now, they are both the recognisable trademarks and the awaited momentum within the Foundation's yearly planning. They are assets and constitute one of the organisation's core strengths also serving as primary platforms of outreach.

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

To that end, the large network of FEPS experts continues to boost and gain recognition while benefiting from a growing number of invitations to contribute to external events. In the years 2024 – 2025, FEPS developed a new modality: organising fringe meetings, which are the segments that, in accordance with the rules, are fully centralised by FEPS.

IV.A Key Annual Public Events 2026

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

Call to Europe | EU | spring and autumn 2026

The *Call to Europe* conference (www.calltoeurope.eu) 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 high-level conferences not only in Brussels, but also in the countries holding the Presidency of the EU. In 2026, FEPS is hoping to hold the events of this series in Cyprus and Ireland respectively.

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

Policy Conference | Brussels | autumn 2026

At the beginning of Fall, FEPS is organising annually a Policy Conference, which serves as a space for a review of the EU policy agenda and an open door debate for the politicians, trade unions, civil society experts and academics. Each year, the event constitutes an excellent opportunity to promote FEPS work on the leading questions pertaining the future of the Union. The event is powered together with the FES Brussels Office.

The thematic field to which Policy Conference is connected is: Social Europe and Economy and Finances, and when appropriate also to other selected fields.

UNITED FOR: Annual international conference organised on the fringe of the UN General Assembly
| New York | 2026

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 continue, making the most effective use of the FEPS ECOSOC consultative status. Consequently, in 2026 FEPS, in accordance to the annual theme defined for UNGA, will focus on sustainability, climate change and natural restoration.

The thematic field UNITED FOR is connected with is: Europe in the World and Climate and Environment

12th Oxford Symposium | Oxford, UK | December 2026

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 and the continent. Each of the editions has been devoted to another focus, resulting 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 12th edition, which will be taking place within a year since the EU – UK relations entered in a new era in May 2025.

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 programme's design a proud example of how longer-term political trainings can be organised with an absolute respect to equal treatment and highest labour standards as principles.

V. | FEPS COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

V.A FEPS Communications

The role of communications has never been more vital, especially after the 2024 super-election year. Progressives are facing major challenges: the rise of the far-right in Europe and nationally, Trump's return to the White House, the war in Ukraine, and the violence against the Palestinian people. Across all these issues, communication has proven essential for informing and connecting people globally.

In tandem with an unstable global political context, FEPS' communication team has been ready to adapt to new events and trends whilst building on our in-house capacity and simultaneously continuing to implement the Communication Strategy adopted by the General Assembly in June 2020. The Strategy remains a valid compass for enhancing visual identity, reinforcing branding, introducing innovative and engaging communication tools, and expanding outreach and impact.

Strategising and planning

Communication is 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. **Ambitious strategising and consistent planning on communications ensure a robust performance.** FEPS Communication Team continues working on:

- **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.
- **Long, mid and short-term communications plans** with clear priorities for all the different FEPS communications' tools.
- Predictability and synergies, which are key to **maximising the lifespan and cross-promotion** opportunities of FEPS materials.
- Ability to respond to unforeseeable relevant developments, which is key for a political foundation. Together with the constant attention that the communication team has on current affairs, **quick reactions and prompt communication have been further reinforced**, facilitated by the participation of the entire team.

FEPS on Social Media

FEPS' communication outreach has strengthened further since last year, **with most platforms (LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube) all growing in following and engagement.**

The numbers are on FEPS' side, reflecting the big effort our team invests in social media, **our readiness to respond to algorithmic trends and our nonstop improvements in both format and content.**

LinkedIn, in particular, saw a phenomenal growth rate of more than 350% in the last three years and almost 170% in the last two years, showcasing that FEPS' content compliments the audience and nature of LinkedIn as a platform.

Our following on Instagram and YouTube doubled, further strengthening our digital reach. **Producing more short and direct videos with the highlights of FEPS' events, podcasts,** and other activities is now part of the FEPS Communications team's regular work, particularly through YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels.

It is important to note that our content **not only reaches our followers** as posts now appear in the feed even when you don't follow a specific account. As a result of this, producing short-form videos is now a crucial means of capturing the attention of followers and non-followers.

With Elon Musk's takeover and his involvement with the Trump administration, thousands of followers left **Twitter** (now known as X), bringing into question whether the platform should continue to be used. FEPS' Communications team adapted rapidly with the creation of FEPS' **Bluesky** account, and with it, the strategy of diversifying and adapting content to a new platform.

Despite the changes, FEPS' X account has the second-highest following among EU political foundations, behind Facebook, and remains a pivotal tool for connecting to politicians, experts, and journalists within Brussels.

In coherence with market trends, **Facebook** stagnated in following growth since 2022. However, there is still a core audience that we must maintain engagement with, especially in specific EU countries.

FEPS has not yet indulged in paid social media promotion, meaning that all of our content is organic. Whilst growth has remained constant, thanks to meticulous strategy and planning alongside tailored strategy for each platforms, paid promotion remains an opportunity for FEPS' communication to expand in 2026. However, the decision to invest in paid promotion must be made with the added context of the role of Big Tech whilst maintaining our social democratic ethos at the heart of our communications.

Events coverage & audiovisual capacity

FEPS continued to expand its audiovisual strategy in 2025, further building on the capacity to document and amplify the impact of events. The new webcams are now fully integrated into the recording and operation of our events, making this system well established and allowing us to explore different camera positions and setups depending on the occasion. A new line of short videos recorded using the FEPS microphone, with its custom foam cover that strengthens our branding, has made it easier to capture insights and reactions in a dynamic and accessible format, whether during events or immediately after.

Selected events are now also available on Spotify, complementing their video presence on YouTube and making content accessible across more platforms. To improve engagement and accessibility, long sessions are increasingly edited into shorter standalone videos of around 25–30 minutes, helping audiences navigate key moments more easily.

In addition, FEPS is increasing its production of short-form content (reels and shorts) based on event footage—an approach we aim to develop further to increase reach and visibility across social media platforms.

FEPS Podcast – FEPS Talks

The FEPS Talks podcast continued to evolve in 2025, building on the revamp of the previous year. With the aim of increasing both reach and engagement, **several new features have been introduced across production, content, and promotion.**

The lighting setup in the FEPS studio has been improved, giving video episodes a more polished and professional look. On the promotional side, we introduced more eye-catching thumbnails and adopted a bolder titling style—more direct, more visual, and designed to connect quickly with online audiences. Each episode now opens with a short teaser (“video pill”) before the intro, and includes chapters in the description to make navigation easier. We’ve also started pinning a FEPS comment on every episode, encouraging viewers to join the discussion and share their thoughts. Full video versions are now also available on Spotify, expanding access across platforms.

In terms of content, FEPS Talks is becoming a more pedagogical podcast—committed to **making complex policy debates accessible and engaging for general audiences.** Looking forward, we are exploring hybrid formats that combine in-studio hosts with online guests, as well as the use of short-form content (reels and shorts) to highlight key moments from each conversation.

FEPS Newsletters

Both the FEPS and Progressive Post newsletters – which share updates on new publications, articles, upcoming and past events – and other relevant activities, are now generally published on fixed days of the week and planned weeks or even months in advance. That said, the content still requires a degree of flexibility and adaptability to remain responsive to emerging developments.

From 2024 to 2025, FEPS newsletters have evolved steadily, marked by a notable shift toward more thematic sections focused on priority topics. We aim to strengthen the relevance of our content by tying it closely to current affairs, often through timely commentaries from our colleagues that help create this clear link.

We also continued enhancing the visual quality of our newsletters on the new platform, which offers better mobile adaptability and expanded customisation and design possibilities. FEPS' metrics demonstrate notable success, boasting an open rate of 37,3% (compared to the 31.8% average) and a click rate of 3.2% (surpassing the 1.5% average).

To further optimise performance, we moved our publication days from Friday to Monday and Tuesday, which tend to deliver better open and click rates. We're also gradually reducing text in favour of more visual elements, including photo montages for post-event coverage, as it makes it more appealing and less overcharged for the reader.

Lastly, we've introduced a personalised event registration tool on the website that simplifies the subscription process. Now, when registering for an event, participants who opt in to the newsletter are automatically added, eliminating the need to enter their information twice and streamlining the user experience.

Visual identity

Our communication team continues to strengthen the **FEPS brand, ensuring it remains distinctive, attractive, and recognisable to target audiences**. While maintaining consistency with our graphic charter, we innovate to keep our visual identity fresh and engaging.

Recognising the value of both digital and traditional communication tools, we enhanced our visual identity across all formats. We now systematically produce flyers and posters to promote FEPS events and publications, take care the presentation of our Library at the FEPS office and explored new ways to enhance content visibility, including updated publication displays.

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.

Website

Launched in 2022, the FEPS website was designed to be our virtual headquarters. Visitors can navigate a dynamic space featuring our projects, events, publications, and key information about the FEPS network. The website is intuitive and interactive, offering an engaging experience that connects users with FEPS authors and ideas. It satisfies the highest standards of aesthetics, user-friendliness and professional content.

Back-office work will continue, focusing on potential innovations, including migrating FEPS-owned secondary websites and strengthening the visibility of members and experts.

Media partnerships & external promotion

Establishing and maintaining a strong network of journalists is a long-term and permanent task. **Cooperation with member foundations** in this field remains crucial to disseminating FEPS' intellectual work beyond the traditional EU bubble audience.

In the last year, **quick and fresh reactions to current affairs have been further reinforced**, facilitated by the entire team's participation. This is essential to capturing the media's attention, as the media are generally more interested in the expertise of FEPS' leadership, team, and in-house knowledge bank rather than in our specific activities. As an example, we can mention the regular participation of FEPS team members in the Euronews TV show 'Brussels My Love'.

Another novelty that followed the adoption of the Communication Strategy is reinforcing the external promotion of FEPS' projects through establishing commercial partnerships with EU-affairs influential media such as Social Europe, Euractiv, and Politico. Additional partnerships with other EU media will be explored.

Network: member foundations and the progressive family

The FEPS member foundations and the other members of the overall progressive family are key natural alleys. 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

FEPS publications

Through sustained effort in recent years, FEPS has developed a strong and consistent output of annual and cyclical publications, which are now recognised as established and reputable FEPS brands. The editorial process for its policy briefs, policy studies and books has undergone significant streamlining and systematisation, demonstrating a commitment to achieving professional publishing standards.

The Progressive Post

The Progressive Post, the flagship quarterly magazine from FEPS, delivers a distinct progressive take on the European Union's role in a rapidly changing world. Available in print and online, it features insightful articles that dissect the complexities of current EU debates. Every issue is built around comprehensive dossiers that provide a deep dive into crucial European and global challenges. It also features compelling interviews, critical reviews of books and movies, and sharp editorials from top progressive thinkers, including lawmakers, academics and experts. Beyond its original English version, The Progressive Post partners with member foundations' magazines to translate its content into other languages, including Czech, Italian and Spanish, ensuring its progressive message resonates across the EU.

The Progressive Post newsletter

To keep its audience informed and engaged, The Progressive Post sends out a weekly newsletter packed with progressive content. Each edition rotates between four types of features: Progressive Pages, offering sharp analysis of key political developments in Europe and authored by the FEPS President, Secretary General and a growing network of influential guest contributors; Dossiers, providing in-depth progressive evaluations of European and international topics through focused collections of three to four articles; the European Progressive Observatory, which provides essential electoral analysis; and Progressive Reads and Views, which offers thoughtful reviews of new books and movies relevant to progressive ideas.

Progressive Yearbook

Having established its Progressive Yearbook (PYB) as a significant resource for European progressives – as demonstrated by the sixth volume published in January 2025 – FEPS will continue to develop this key publication in 2026. The PYB will continue to offer a valuable instrument for interpreting the past year and discerning future trends, featuring its established sections on the previous year's developments, predictions for the coming year, insightful case studies on relevant national contexts and an interview with the Progressive Person of the Year.

FEPS Primers Series

This item is a cross-cutting point between the publications' chapter and the section that refers to the FEPS Training Programme, as the primers remain the collection of the educational books that FEPS is publishing with a target to inform about the specific European policy areas, and then raise herewith the knowledge and contribute indirectly to rising of the standards of the debate on the Future of Europe from progressive perspective.

FEPS Book Series

Since 2022, FEPS has been collaborating with the London Publishing Partnership and Dietz Verlag, in addition to its existing partnership with ASPRA. This cooperation ensures high-quality editorial products and reliable inputs for our programmes. Furthermore, the market availability of all printed books (except the Progressive Yearbook) also supports our quality control efforts.

FEPS Policy Briefs and Policy Studies

To effectively disseminate research findings and critical analyses of key contemporary issues, accompanied by clear policy recommendations, FEPS offers two distinct yet complementary publication series for both specialised and wider audiences. Policy Briefs provide concise and timely analyses primarily aimed at European and national decision-makers and administrators. Policy Studies offer in-depth, research-based examinations of policies, policy processes and their impact on the EU and European societies. While maintaining a unified visual identity, these publications differ in format and have proven invaluable in promoting the outcomes of FEPS projects and informing numerous events.

Annex 1: FEPS 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, as well as bilateral relations with strategic partners in diverse formats of alliances, partnerships and neighbourhood policies. Contributing to the development of a stronger security and defence dimension of the EU and a geoeconomic analysis of the new global reality.

In an increasingly multipolar world, the European Union faces challenges and opportunities to assert its role as a promoter of peace, multilateralism and sustainable development. Strengthening the EU’s engagement requires revitalizing global partnerships based on mutual respect, equality, and shared responsibility, moving beyond paternalistic attitudes and top-down approaches. The EU must be active to help shape international norms and standards by advancing shared global agendas while ensuring its policies reflect European values and interests.

At the same time, the EU must continue the path toward European Strategic Autonomy, reducing reliance on the United States in the security, economic, and diplomatic agendas. Strategic autonomy strengthens the EU’s ability to act decisively and coherently on the global stage, enhancing credibility and influence. Yet, European security cannot be seen in isolation. The current context would emphasize the urgent need to develop a new global security architecture—one that moves beyond a narrowly EU-focused approach to defence and addresses the long-term global consequences of rearmament and adversarial bloc posturing. The challenge is how to reverse the tide of militarization and, together with global partners, promote disarmament, sustainable peace, and human security.

Equally important is reinforcing the EU’s commitment to international law and global justice. Upholding the rules-based international order, supporting international judicial bodies, and promoting accountability for human rights violations and humanitarian law must be the guiding principle of the EU’s external action.

The EU can play a decisive role in promoting peace, development, and justice in today’s changing world by combining principled diplomacy, strategic autonomy, and a commitment to equitable partnerships.

Protecting humanity in armed conflict: Re-committing to International Humanitarian Law

In a moment of heightened geopolitical tensions and increasing protracted armed conflicts, we are witnessing escalating unmet humanitarian needs alongside systematic violations of international humanitarian law (IHL). There is an urgent need to uphold the principles of IHL and the Geneva Conventions, which protect all of us during armed conflict and set globally agreed limits on the conduct of war. In this context, the EU has the opportunity to reclaim its role as a strong defender of international law and the authority of international tribunals, moving beyond double standards and promoting accountability. By forming a coalition of like-minded actors committed to these rules, we can work towards reinforcing the global framework that safeguards humanity in conflict and ensures that legal norms are respected and enforced.

Contributing to the EU defence and security dimension

The “Zeitenwende” of Europe means an epoch change that brings about a greater need for the EU to play a role in collective defence and security. FEPS is building on hitherto work in the context of the war in Ukraine and the White Paper on European Defence (2025 March). In what areas the EU would need to be more active as a coordinator of defence capacities will remain a major debate that requires awareness of conventional military functions but also new developments e.g. in the field of cyber and hybrid warfare. Such an investigation can only be complete if the financial as well as human resources required for a common European defence capacity are also considered.

Reshaping Global Development Cooperation

As development cooperation is being reconsidered globally and the EU evaluates its funding priorities, there is an opportunity to set a new development agenda based on equality, impact, and long-term goals. This involves two main approaches. First, strengthening partnerships by shifting from traditional models to strategic alliances built on mutual interests and co-created objectives. Second, enhancing the EU’s instruments, particularly the Global Gateway initiative, transforming it from a flagship investment program into a global platform for joint development. Achieving this requires redesigning governance, aligning EU and partner priorities, and investing in both infrastructure and local capacities. By combining stronger partnerships with more effective tools, the EU can foster sustainable, inclusive, and long-lasting development outcomes.

Rebuilding Ukraine: Towards Social Resilience and Inclusion

After more than three years, the war in Ukraine is having deep social, economic, and psychological effects. While Russian attacks continue and attention turns to political negotiations, there is an urgent need to address the mental health consequences of the conflict. Communities—and especially children

and young people—are experiencing trauma and are at risk of long-term psychological harm. Addressing these challenges also requires comprehensive support for refugees and internally displaced persons, including measures that help them integrate into social and economic life and ensure access to education, healthcare, and employment, both in Ukraine and in host countries. At the same time, steps must be taken to prevent tensions with host populations by fostering social cohesion and mutual understanding.

Supporting Ukraine’s EU accession offers a unique opportunity to build a more social, equitable, and rights-based society, aligning reforms with European standards while promoting social justice and inclusion .

Enhancing EU-Africa relations with a comprehensive approach

The European Union and its member states have long-standing relations with African countries, yet these ties face growing challenges. In regions such as the Sahel, anti-European sentiment is rising, while new actors like Russia and China are expanding their influence, offering alternative partnerships that appeal to some African nations. Within the EU, calls for better coordination across member states and policy areas—have intensified to ensure a more coherent and effective approach to Africa.

In this context, the EU-Africa Progressive Network has been established to foster inclusive dialogue on key European policies affecting Africa, from just transitions and social protection floors to comprehensive strategies in crisis-affected regions. By promoting evidence-based, collaborative solutions, the network aims to enhance policy coherence and impact. Critically, the EU must move beyond transactional models, listen to African voices, and recognize Africa not merely as a recipient but as a provider of capital and resources.

Contributing to the Global Network of Think-tanks of the Progressive Alliance

FEPS, as an associated member of the Progressive Alliance and building on its relationships with progressive think-tanks in other continents, can make a particular contribution to developing the cooperation among them and building up the Global Network of Think-tanks of the Progressive Alliance, as recently decided by its Board. This cooperation will focus on the exchange of experience, not only about progressive policy solutions but also about new ways to communicate about them.

2. MIGRATION – informing and sustaining a fair debate on asylum and migration, prioritising the monitoring of the Pact on Migration and Asylum’s implementation and the development of integration and labour policies that actively build social cohesion; defining the features of an efficient and humane migration management; developing fair and transparent relations with the countries of origin and transit; as well as analysing the vital link between Europe’s demographic challenges and migration dynamics.

Throughout 2025, migration continued to be a highly divisive and toxic issue, a trend that has persisted for over a decade. While the New Pact on Migration and Asylum was formally adopted, its entry into force in June 2026 presents a new challenge. In anticipation, some member states have already undertaken independent courses of action, reintroducing border controls, suspending certain asylum rights, or closing bilateral deals with non-EU countries.

Migration also remained a prominent topic in electoral campaigns, highlighting two key issues. First, political parties continue to use the issue to capitalise on public anxieties. Second, the Pact is not yet seen or presented as a comprehensive, long-term solution. The clear trend is towards increasingly restrictive migration rules, which will make entry into Europe more and more difficult and, in turn, push migrants towards ever more dangerous routes.

Against this backdrop, the progressive movement is struggling to find a common voice. It is too often caught in the trap of adopting right-wing narratives to try to win back voters, a strategy that rarely succeeds. This approach has also turned many progressive parties into an echo chamber for the right's toxic narratives on migration.

For 2026, FEPS's goal is to persevere with its fact-based analysis of migration dynamics and the formulation of fact-based and people-centred policy proposals, with a renewed focus on the social dimension of migration and integration. It will also analyse the impact of the changing international order and balance of power on migration dynamics and governance. FEPS will continue its main priority of promoting an equal, fair and transparent dialogue among countries of origin, transit and destination, with the aim of fostering fair partnerships and sustainable development.

Rebalancing migration relations between Africa and Europe

Under the new chairmanship of António Vitorino, the Progressive Migration Group will continue its crucial work of analysis, policy proposal formulation and advocacy. The group is a unique collaborative platform where an equal number of African and European migration experts meet to exchange knowledge and perspectives on migration dynamics between the two continents.

This format ensures that policy proposals are directly informed by the priorities and needs of the African countries: an essential perspective often neglected by European and national lawmakers. With a bottom-up approach, the group's members collectively decide on topics for each cycle. In 2026, the work will focus on the intersection between migration and issues where we have observed a broader backlash: gender, climate change and development cooperation.

Critically assessing the New Pact on Migration and Asylum

By June 2026, EU member states are required to have fully implemented the provisions of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. However, given the ongoing trend of unilateral actions and the persistent reluctance of some states to cooperate on migration matters, it will be crucial to analyse the state of play in key member states during the second half of the year.

This analysis will help us understand where the implementation stands, what gaps remain and where the policy is headed. Despite its many shortcomings, the Pact represents the Union's best chance to manage migration collectively. Any attempt to restart the deliberation process would likely fail or result in even more restrictive measures. Therefore, a thorough look at the current situation is essential to provide meaningful and humane policy proposals for this complex area of European integration.

Highlighting the social dimension of migration

Migration has become one of the most divisive issues in Europe and beyond. While ageing societies increasingly rely on migrants to fill labour market gaps and sustain welfare states, the rapid pace of demographic change, combined with economic hardship and the proliferation of negative narratives, creates a perfect recipe for social tensions.

To counteract these tensions and ensure that migration benefits both newcomers and natives, we must prioritise social cohesion. This requires robust social policies for all. Strong social policies are the foundation of strong social cohesion, which is why our work will focus on the state of working conditions, access to essential services and social rights – including for irregular migrants – in the EU member states. By examining these areas, we can formulate crucial policy proposals to build a more inclusive and resilient society for everyone.

Understanding the geopolitics of migration

Borders are more than physical lines; they are human constructs reinforced by narratives, laws and social practices. In the 21st century, the very idea of a border is rapidly evolving due to technology,

climate change and geopolitical shifts. Using biometrics, AI and surveillance technologies is profoundly changing border management, threatening privacy and extending state control far beyond physical frontiers. A project on this topic will explore these new dimensions of the border: from how they are conceived today and how they shape the identities of both natives and migrants, to their profound impact on international relations and the concept of security itself.

3. SOCIAL EUROPE – monitoring the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as the creation of the EU’s Affordable Housing Plan and Anti-Poverty Strategy, ensuring the social dimension of the next Multiannual Financial Framework, and developing new ideas related to the concept of work as well as in the field of healthcare, wellbeing, education and provision of public services.

While the political debate is dominated by security and competitiveness, ensuring good, fair living and working conditions for all must remain a central priority for social democrats. True to their historical commitment to Social Europe, this must be driven by the idea of wellbeing of people and the planet. This must consider the latest technological developments, the ongoing debate on the nature of work as well as the consequences of the climate crisis and geopolitical developments. Across the board, addressing growing inequalities shall be a guide, focusing on inclusion and with specific attention to marginalised groups.

“Social Europe” allows to make progress on FEPS three annual priorities. The protection of the European Social Model, rooted in social dialogue and workers’ rights, must be a defining element of the European Union’s stance in the world, in comparison to the United States or China. It must guide our approach to the green and digital transition, serving people and the planet instead of unregulated, extractive, and exploitative multinational companies. It is central to the democratic nature of the European project, rooted in solidarity and equality. It must drive any enlargement prospects, ensuring upwards convergence and strengthened territorial cohesion instead of social dumping and exacerbated inequalities.

The EU political agenda offers strategic opportunities for FEPS positioning and engagement, including through the new Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, delivering on the Porto targets, the upcoming Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Affordable Housing Plan and initiatives in the field of employment, training and education, as well as the negotiations for the next Multiannual

Financial Framework. Therefore, FEPS should actively engage on those files, while also being a source of new ideas in the field of healthcare, including mental health, education and access to public services for all and in all territories.

Framing the debate about the future of work and workers' rights

Work is no longer solely the main defining identity point for citizens in Europe. The evolution of societal roles, new technologies and the global context are shaping the new relationship to work across industries – for both blue- and white-collar jobs – while also calling for the development of new jobs.

FEPS should therefore position itself both in influencing the European Commission's employment policies, particularly by strengthening the role of trade unions, advancing democracy at work and ensuring quality employment standards in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights. FEPS should also offer a space to debate the evolution of the concept of work and quality jobs, exploring issues such as the protection of platform workers, reduction of working time, pensions, and the right to disconnect, hence opening frontiers for new workers' rights, and improved wellbeing for all.

Advancing the progressive agenda for housing

Addressing the housing crisis remains a key priority for social democrats. With people unable to afford rents or ownership, facing energy poverty or lacking access to social housing, the EU Affordable Housing Plan should provide a comprehensive answer to what is now finally recognised as a pan-European issue.

FEPS has pioneered housing policy work for years already and should remain a source of ideas and debate. Following the presentation of the EU plan, FEPS should mobilise its network to analyse and monitor its implementation, while continuing to explore progressive, inclusive, creative and rights-based solutions. The question of financing should also be central, especially given the negotiations of the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Promoting "One health" approach and the European Health Union

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the main mantra at EU level was the development of a genuine European Health Union, ensuring resilience against future threats and reinforcing medical infrastructure as well as research and innovation capacity. However, priorities have shifted, and healthcare is merely seen through the lens of crisis management nowadays.

With an agenda oriented towards wellbeing, social democrats must be at the forefront of ensuring universal access to quality healthcare, based on prevention and awareness. It shall take a "One Health"

approach, integrating not only the human dimension but also environmental and biodiversity considerations. FEPS has already advanced its work on the European Health Union and should further develop its research on issues such as the EU's pharmaceutical industrial capacity, medical treatments of chronic diseases, and cross-border cooperation. FEPS should also build on its work on mental health to develop a comprehensive approach at the European level.

Eliminating the barriers preventing equal access to public services

After decades of the withdrawal of state authorities and outsourcing to private service providers, there is a growing demand for universally accessible quality public services. Medical deserts remain in Europe and essential public services, such as education, local safety, but also culture, are often the first to suffer austerity measures. But the strength of the European social model must ensure access to care facilities, schools and any services that contribute to wellbeing, protection and emancipation.

As a strong advocate of European integration built on delivering common public goods, FEPS should further explore barriers that prevent universal access to public services in the European Union, notably examining issues such digitalisation, demographic change, public procurement and cross-border cooperation.

Raising ambition for social investments amid deliberation on competitiveness

This legislative term is focused on improving the European Union's competitiveness, building on the Draghi and Letta reports. However, competitiveness should not be seen as a cover-up for deregulation or lower social and environmental standards. The European Union needs to strengthen its social dimension, increasing large-scale investments in its industry, infrastructure and public services to improve wellbeing and cohesion across the Union while preserving our environment.

2026 will be a year of intense negotiations on the post-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework. The current proposal by the European Commission foresees a vague percentage on "social expenditure" and puts at risk cohesion policy for all regions in the future national and regional partnership plans. FEPS should support social democrats in these negotiations to ensure ambitious social investments to deliver on the targets of the action plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights and to strengthen cohesion and solidarity across the Union.

4. ECONOMY AND FINANCE – designing a resilient and sustainable economic development model, to forge policy proposals towards a job-rich growth through a robust European industrial policy as well as the EU fiscal capacity; advocating fair taxation to support the innovative, fair, competitive and productive economy, and scaling up economic democracy.

The years of status quo for the European economy are over. After the shock of the pandemic and the ensuing inflation, a new challenge has emerged from within geopolitics and trade relations. Importantly, the EU needs to find solutions not only for itself, but also on the global level, as many countries and regions look up to it to provide leadership in the vacuum left by the US. So far, the EU has provided a rather meek response, driven more by opportunism and business interests. There is a dire need for an alternative, viable vision. Therefore, for the coming 2026, progressives should mobilise and use this challenging moment of the unraveling of the old economic order seeking to build a new model, based on solidarity, equity and sustainability.

Trade tensions, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the energy crisis further revealed weaknesses of Europe's market-driven industrial strategy. Decades of reliance on the laissez-faire approach to its industrial policy have trapped the EU into deep dependencies for strategic technologies and raw materials while exposing it to volatility in energy prices. In the last several years, the EU has undertaken significant policy shifts within its Green Deal agenda to make its industrial policy more interventionist and better aligned with its environmental and strategic objectives. However, these policy shifts remain limited by a fragmented multi-level governance rooted in national reluctances to deepen political integration, as well as by the EU constraining macroeconomic rules. Moreover, the recent resetting of the EU political agenda around deregulation and simplification drives policy away from its strategic goals. The growing global challenges should incentivise the EU to enhance efforts towards building a genuine European industrial strategy.

The elaboration of the next long-term EU budget - MFF - is going to be another dominant theme in 2026. The proposal tabled by the Commission in July 2025 looks problematic on a number of fronts and is going to be an important battlefield not only to safeguard but also strengthen progressive priorities. Financing remains the major challenge for many policy areas, from industrial policy and innovation to housing and healthcare. It is worth exploring new, probably unconventional ways of financing these fields.

Building an effective European industrial policy

The deviation of the industrial policy agenda towards deregulation and simplification, as well as a very narrow interpretation of economic competitiveness in 2025 looks rather unhelpful for the European goal of sustainable, just and innovative economy. Apart from fighting the conservative narratives and initiatives, progressives need to offer solutions on how to implement European objectives in the realm of industrial policy. These solutions are going to involve a stronger but also smarter state at all levels, regional cohesion and deep democratisation of policies. The need for the EU to implement an ambitious industrial policy will also probably require changes to the European Single Market (ESM) design, to enable more coherent policy implementation. FEPS has already produced a range of publications on industrial policy; for 2026 the focus could fall more on stronger promotion of these ideas into policy making circles.

Advocating for an adequate European budget

The European Commission published its Multiannual Financial Framework proposal for 2028-34 in July 2025. For the next 2 years, the budget discussion will be on top of the EU policy agenda. FEPS naturally needs to contribute to it. We would like to explore ideas on how the capacity of the European budget can be enhanced and to make sure that the new budget's priorities are aligned with the social-democratic agenda. We plan to accelerate the existing project “EU investment capacity”, which has proven to be very successful in 2025. Unlike in the 2025 project, we would like to make the discussion more public in 2026.

Ensuring Financing for the European priorities

The topic of financing of European priorities is related to the EU budget but can also be singled out in a separate stream, as there are fields that require broader forms of financing, not necessarily from the EU budget. The two particular areas that we want to explore are the financing of scale-up of innovation eco-systems and of affordable housing. Both require massive investments. We would like to explore some unconventional ideas for financing of these areas, exploring successful cases in other regions (notably Asia), as well as in Europe itself, and to see how their recipes can be successfully applied across the EU. Both topics are cross-portfolio (with Thematic fields 3 and 6, respectively).

Outlining solutions to the trade and global imbalances

The unravelling of the intranational trade system in the wake of Trump’s tariffs calls for Europe to not only defend itself but also to uphold the multilateral trading system. At the same time, the solution should also be found to reduce global imbalances in trade in goods and services and in financial flows. The progressive solution should take into account that the old trading system was very unbalanced,

perpetuating or even exacerbating inequality between but also within countries. Now is an opportunity moment for the progressives to step up and offer solutions to reform global economic architecture. The role of currencies, and the international monetary system in general, in the process of global rebalancing is to be explored. To do this work, we would need to mobilize top-quality intellectual and policy minds in the EU and globally.

Promoting economic democracy

The democratisation of the economy is the recurrent frontier for social democracy. Promoting these ideas would help Social Democrats offer a positive and invigorating economic vision. Economic democracy gives people agency over their own economic fortunes and the economic decisions of their enterprises, communities and countries. This empowerment of people is the key to the renewal of social democracy. FEPS will continue to promote this idea both within social democratic circles and with the broader public. Possible streams of work for 2026 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.

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.

Climate change and biodiversity loss are existential threats to human beings. Extreme events made more frequent and devastating by climate change – heatwaves, floods, forest fires, etc. – are piling up year after year, causing the loss of lives and substantial economic losses¹. Current climate action in the EU and internationally is insufficient to keep climate change at a safe level, avoid accelerated human-induced species losses and safely adapt to the impacts of climate change that are already unfolding.

Without a safe and stable climate and the ecosystem services provided by biodiversity, any effort and progress in human rights, social protection, and economic well-being will be jeopardised. Therefore, climate action and environmental protection must be at the core of the European Union's policies. We need to stand ahead of the curve by changing with intention rather than reacting haphazardly.

However, climate action and environmental protection are both facing increasing opposition and rollback from right-wing political parties, mostly on the grounds of baseless affirmations and outright disinformation. Stuck in a “business as usual” mindset and protecting the economic interests of a few, such political positions deny the opportunities from a just transition towards climate neutrality in terms of industrial competitiveness, strategic autonomy, health and peace. This situation threatens the wellbeing of European citizens, undermines democracy and diminishes the legitimacy and influence of the EU on the international stage.

The European progressive family must stay committed to the implementation of the European Green Deal, in line with international climate agreements and science. To do so, FEPS must, among many issues, advocate for an integrated European strategy for industrial decarbonisation, a just transition for workers, an ambitious European adaptation plan, and international climate dialogue and justice.

Forging a European strategy for a strong decarbonised industry

The year 2025 saw opposing dynamics occur, with a potentially promising Clean Industrial Deal (CID) on one hand and a significant rollback on environmental regulations and targets on the other. The EU needs to stay the course of the European Green Deal and propose an effective implementation of the CID for a decarbonised, competitive and strategically autonomous Europe. In addition, the EU must enhance the European dimension of its clean industrial policies by better taking into account regional differences and cohesion. It must also “de-silo” its industrial policies by integrating both social and environmental dimensions.

Supporting European workers and cohesion in the name of just transition:

The coming years will probably see major changes, with the potential end of the Just Transition Fund, the start of the Social Climate Fund and the restructuring of the MFF. In this context, ensuring a just transition towards climate neutrality by protecting people and regions in vulnerable situations must remain a key priority for the progressive family. Best practices, research, networks and finance are necessary to prevent the just transition from becoming an empty promise. In addition, the EU must support just transition processes in accession countries.

Defining climate adaptation for all

The new European Climate Adaptation Plan (ECAP) is announced for the second half of 2026. Much is needed throughout Europe to protect people and the economy against the impacts of climate change impacts and to increase common wellbeing through nature restoration and biodiversity protection. It will not be an easy exercise to find the right balance between a European vision and the context-

specific nature of adaptation. The ECAP must enable efficient and sustainable adaptation for all citizens and in all sectors.

For diversified and ambitious climate partnerships

The global spread of disinformation, the rise of right-wing governments and the Trump presidency create a turbulent context for international climate negotiations, with high risks of stagnation or rollback while the climate rapidly warms. The EU must continue to champion ambitious climate action on the international stage and with a diversified array of partners, to avoid the disastrous consequences of a world with temperatures above +2°C. Multilateralism, justice and transparency must guide the EU's climate action and the demands of international progressive movements.

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.

Digital continues to be an important topic at all levels of governance although, compared to the previous mandate, a notable shift is underway. While the previous mandate was characterised by legislation, we now see a movement towards implementation, enforcement, simplification, and investment. In parallel, the existing body of digital legislation is increasingly under pressure from foreign and EU governments, the private sector and other stakeholders. Regulation is increasingly successfully being framed as the antithesis of competitiveness and innovation, crowding out crucial debates about the consequences of profit-driven digitalisation, the environmental and social cost of digitalisation and so on. It risks undoing years of pioneering work through legislation like the GDPR, DSA and the AI Act, which have all significantly been shaped by progressives.

Meanwhile, the far-right's hold over the online sphere is steadily growing and Big Tech's crusade against EU digital regulation is being emboldened by the second Trump administration. While the EU has rightfully decided it needs to become 'more sovereign' when it comes to digital technologies, important questions such as *what* and *how* do we invest to reach this goal remained unanswered.

Within this context, it is more important than ever that progressives unite and work to shape the trajectory of digitalisation in the EU, taking issues such as workers' rights, sustainability, social justice, privacy and public interest.

Designing a roadmap towards digital sovereignty

The recent years have made painfully clear how dependent the EU has become on US and to a lesser degree on China when it comes to digital technologies. While consensus exists around the need to reverse this situation, the path to sovereignty is one shaped by several economic and political considerations such as which investments are prioritised and what financial instruments are used. Furthermore, it touches upon other key issues like public procurement, digital taxation, developing digital public infrastructure, competition (e.g. in cloud and AI markets) and public-private cooperation.

For progressives, sovereignty is a fundamental precondition for ensuring that digitalization happens in line with European values. It is therefore crucial that we collect and highlight existing best practices and can present clear and feasible roadmap towards digital sovereignty that considers the domestic conditions across member states and the EU's governance structure and is built on progressive values like the respect of fundamental rights and empowering workers.

Advocating for Ethics in AI

AI systems are increasingly shaping decisions in employment, justice, healthcare, and public services, yet their functioning and ethical and social implications remain at the sidelines of the public debate. Although EU regulation like the AI Act emphasises human rights, transparency, and accountability, the current political context often puts competitiveness, innovation, and surveillance over social justice. In addition, women, migrants, racialised communities, and other marginalised groups face the discriminatory effects of biased algorithms.

For progressives, it is crucial that AI systems benefit people, not profits. This requires advocating for binding safeguards on algorithmic fairness and explainability, promoting public participation in AI policymaking, and framing AI debates around human needs and democratic values. Only by centring people can the EU's AI policies advance justice, rights, and social progress.

Ensuring sustainability of digital

Progressives have played a crucial role in fighting for a greener and more sustainable EU, with clear, legally binding targets and comprehensive legislation. However, the environmental impacts of data-, energy- and compute-intensive technologies such as AI remains largely unaddressed. Tensions around the development of data centres across the EU highlight how digital is increasingly pulled into political

discussions around and competition for scarce resources such as (clean) electricity, water and land. The increasing use of AI risks cancelling out any emissions reduction that could be achieved through renewable energy and energy efficiency in the digital sector and becoming a new significant source of emissions throughout the world. Europe's quest to mine more of its own rare earth minerals is another example that raises uncomfortable questions.

Considering current trends, these discussions will only intensify. It is therefore crucial that progressives can provide clear solutions that balances the economic, scientific and social utility of digital technologies with their resource use and planetary boundaries as well as the need of communities.

Defining algorithmic management and digitalisation trajectory for the public sector

Algorithmic management is becoming increasingly prevalent, also outside of platform work. This means that trade unions are also looking at this issue more, developing new bargaining strategies and leveraging EU and national legislation to drive better outcomes for workers.

In parallel, investments in digitalisation in the public sector are growing, especially in terms in AI and other algorithmic systems. However, public sector digitalisation has been marred by several high-profile scandals, exemplifying the complexity of such processes and the lack of awareness and oversight. By looking at algorithmic management and public sector digitalisation in the Nordics – which are advanced digital economies and where worker involvement is guaranteed through the Nordic model – we hope to identify learnings and best practices that can be utilised across Europe and beyond.

Reconquering the digital space from the far-right

Digital technologies and especially social media platforms have become powerful tools for far-right movements, enabling recruitment, radicalization, and the spread of extremist narratives. The anonymity and reach of digital spaces allow fringe ideologies to enter mainstream discourse, influencing politics and public opinion. Algorithm-driven recommendation systems can amplify divisive content, creating echo chambers that entrench extremist beliefs.

By investigating the use of social media by far-right actors (e.g., how they leverage influencers) as well as the reasons behind the general dominance of conservative, far-right narratives and content on these platforms, we can outline challenges and opportunities for progressive communication in the current digital landscape.

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 remains at the heart of Europe’s democratic, social, and economic project. Yet, in 2026, progressives face mounting challenges. Persistent gender pay, care, and pension gaps, combined with unequal access to leadership and decision-making, continue to limit women’s and LGBTIQ people’s full participation in society. The rise of far-right, ultraconservative movements feeds into an orchestrated backlash against women’s rights, SRHR, and LGBTIQ equality, threatening the hard-won legislative gains of recent years. New divides also emerge: women remain underrepresented in green and digital sectors, while cyberviolence, disinformation, and harassment increasingly silence women and minority voices in public life. Intersectional inequalities further deepen the gap, leaving racialised women, migrants, Roma, women with disabilities, and those in precarious jobs most exposed to poverty and exclusion.

The EU has recognised these challenges. The *2025 Roadmap for Women’s Rights* and the forthcoming *EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030* reaffirm the commitment to a “Union of Equality” with transformative, mainstreamed policies. The new *LGBTIQ Strategy 2026–2030* will similarly aim to counter hate, ensure equal rights, and strengthen protections for all. These frameworks provide essential momentum, yet their success will depend on sustained political will, progressive alliances, and concrete implementation at EU and national levels.

Within this context, FEPS positions gender equality as a cornerstone of its mission. Contributing to the three annual priorities of the FAP 2026, FEPS will:

- Anchor gender equality within Europe’s strategic autonomy and global partnerships (*Priority 1*).
- Promote transformative socio-economic policies to reduce inequalities, strengthen the care economy, and ensure inclusive digital and green transitions (*Priority 2*).
- Defend democracy through feminist leadership, stronger representation, and protection from backlash in Europe and beyond (*Priority 3*).

FEPS will support the progressive family in turning these commitments into impact, helping to secure substantive equality for women, men, and LGBTIQ persons across Europe.

Preventing Gender-Based Violence in a Digital Era

The adoption of the EU Directive on Violence Against Women marked a historic step, but implementation must be safeguarded. Online violence, deepfakes, and gendered disinformation are on the rise, threatening women in politics, journalism, and activism. LGBTIQ communities are also targeted disproportionately. FEPS will convene expertise and civil society partners to provide evidence, policy tools, and progressive narratives that strengthen prevention and ensure accountability. By tackling digital GBV, FEPS contributes directly to stronger democracies (*Priority 3*) and more resilient societies (*Priority 2*).

Closing the Gender Gaps in Work and Care

Europe cannot thrive without tackling structural inequalities in the labour market. Women still shoulder most unpaid care, resulting in persistent pay and pension gaps. Single mothers, migrant women, and women with disabilities are most affected. FEPS will advance debates on the care economy, gender-responsive budgeting, and progressive economic governance. By linking gender equality to fiscal, labour, and social reforms, FEPS strengthens Europe's transformative model (*Priority 2*) and competitiveness (*Priority 1*).

Feminist Leadership for Democracy

Women and LGBTIQ persons remain underrepresented in decision-making and face political harassment and violence. This undermines democracy and citizen trust. FEPS will promote feminist leadership, capacity-building for progressive parties, and exchange with partners in EU enlargement and third countries. These efforts will help embed equality as a democratic benchmark, reinforcing Europe's democratic resilience (*Priority 3*).

Gender-Responsive Green and Digital Transitions

The green and digital transitions risk reinforcing existing divides if not designed inclusively. Women are underrepresented in STEM, AI, and renewable energy, while rural and low-income groups risk exclusion from new opportunities. FEPS will produce evidence on the gendered impacts of these transitions and advocate inclusive frameworks for just transitions. This work strengthens Europe's resilience (*Priority 2*) and global credibility in sustainable development (*Priority 1*).

Global Solidarity for Women's Rights

Women and LGBTIQ persons in conflict, authoritarian regimes, and humanitarian crises face heightened risks. The EU's credibility as a global actor depends on defending SRHR, advancing feminist foreign policy, and ensuring inclusive peacebuilding. The forthcoming *EU Gender Action Plan IV (GAP IV)*, which will succeed GAP III, is a crucial opportunity to reaffirm gender equality as a central pillar of

EU external action. FEPS will contribute by working with international partners to provide progressive input into GAP IV and beyond, ensuring that feminist perspectives shape Europe's global partnerships. In this way, FEPS helps guarantee that global solidarity underpins Europe's strategic autonomy (*Priority 1*) and strengthens its democratic values (*Priority 3*).

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, as well as strategic partnerships such as the one with the UK

The European Union has been in need of a new vision that will make it a project that is viable, forward-looking and resilient amid the turmoil of contemporary times. This has a number of implications. First of all, this brings back the question of the necessity to seek an internal reform. On one hand, there is a clear need 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 recent developments, when the EU needed to act fast and either the procedures would prevent it, or the blocking minority would – the fair question to ask is how to make the Union better equipped.

On the other hand, there is also yet another imperative. In the past legislative period, hopes have been raised that the long-time blocked enlargement process would be revived and the Union would see its expansion. Despite the fact that there may be a new period of stagnation on the horizon again, the Progressives must remain committed and pursue the argumentation that the EU must both expand and transform, especially since the aspiration remains to strive for a strong, resilient and effective Europe that matters geopolitically as an actor that acts coherently. And in that spirit, it must think about the entirety of the tools it has to forge alliances, which are so much required in the current geopolitical context. Hence, the attention must go to enlargement, be devoted to other partnerships – with EFTA members, with the UK or within the Eastern Partnership.

Although the task of speaking about the Political Union has never been easy, being far too often perceived as a sign of self-centrism or extension of a technocratic dispute, it is paramount that the

progressives continue promoting the debate. First, because it is a matter of strengthening Unions' democratic legitimacy and preparing citizens to engage in a critical manner, once ratification processes are upon them. Secondly, because it is a question of enabling the interactions with them. The citizens are much more informed and willing to engage than ever before, but whilst they do, they need to be listened to and responded to. This is why there must also be further thoughts given to designing new mechanisms to facilitate participatory and deliberative democracy, to empower citizens and civil society organizations, and to ensure that creativity and contribution through initiatives 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.

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 continued also in the next years, and now it is timely to pick and build on their legacies. 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 for now and for in the future, while in case of FEPS they require revisiting to be more fine-tuned and where needed, altered, taking into account the changing global context and the internal dynamics of the Union itself.

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 rationale for their diverse decisions 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. FEPS and FES held a debate in the EP to revisit the findings upon 1 year's anniversary of the previous elections, and responding to the enthusiastic reception and high demand, it wishes to continue building on that tradition.

Promoting Friends of the Western Balkans

In 2026, the Friends of the Western Balkans network marks a significant milestone: its fifth anniversary. To celebrate this occasion and continue its work, the network will hold two meetings in the course of the year, one in an EU member state and another in a Western Balkans candidate country. Locations are to be confirmed by the FoWB steering committee, chaired by FEPS, with Hungary and North Macedonia being the most likely hosts.

As in previous years, the network – comprising national and European lawmakers, think tankers, academics and other stakeholders – will convene to discuss, from a progressive perspective, key issues and challenges facing the enlargement process, while also focusing on the internal development of candidate countries.

Pursuing the enlargement agenda with the 3rd annual conference

For the third time, FEPS – building on its previous experience and in collaboration with its established partners – aims to convene a conference on enlargement. The event will include progressive representatives from all ten candidate countries, and will promote exchanges around the common challenges that candidate states face in their complex accession process. The goal is to foster dialogue among the accession states and to increase prospective members' understanding of European dynamics and issues, helping to bridge the gap between Brussels and the aspiring members and to increase synergies among progressive forces on both sides.

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. The recent change in the government in the UK, as well as the geopolitical necessity, led to a new agreement between the EU and the UK in May 2025, whereby many speak about turning the page and opening a new chapter. Many aspects of this new accord still remain open, but it is clear that it will be developing and will be multifaceted – touching upon the core questions such as partnership in trade, defence, energy,

research and education, migration and others. FEPS believes in its role on these issues – having strong credentials and a foundation of over fifteen years of collaboration with British partners. Following the successful and first ever EU – UK Progressive Forum, which FEPS and FES Brussels and London held in June 2025 – the intention is to continue the work with the strategic outlook, recognising that the EU-UK partnership remains integral aspect of the future of Europe and initiatives such as European Political Community (EPC).

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.

Assaults on democracy across Member States and the EU continued through 2025 with unprecedented intensity. Europe faces a converging threat: emboldened national far-right forces, presenting themselves as the best response to today’s polycrises, amplified by a cross-border metapolitical ecosystem of parties, media, influencers and think tanks, and at times abetted by foreign interference. Electoral breakthroughs in countries once seen as resilient (Portugal), centre-right deals in the European Parliament reliant on far-right votes, and backlash against democratic coalitions (Poland) all push the boundaries of the acceptable and corrode trust in institutions. The result is a harsher, more fragmented terrain for progressive policymaking. Heading into 2026, the tests will intensify. High-stakes elections—in Hungary and in Sweden—will shape Europe’s trajectory. Meanwhile, citizens grapple with cost-of-living pressures, war on Europe’s borders, and unsettled green, digital and demographic transitions. As everyday insecurity grows, politics can feel distant; disaffection rises, and participation remains uneven by age, class, gender and geography.

For progressives, three broad tasks define the moment. First, protect democracy: uphold the rule of law and civic space; counter foreign interference, disinformation and AI-driven manipulation; ensure platform accountability and media pluralism; and build strategic literacy to expose authoritarian narratives. Upcoming EU strategies and legislation—including the Civil Society Strategy, the European Democracy Shield, debates on conditionality in the new MFF, and the implementation of digital laws such as the DSA and AI Act—will be decisive battlegrounds. Second, renew democracy: strengthen parties as vehicles of inclusion and representation; embed deliberation so that assemblies, participatory budgeting and citizens’ initiatives inform the policy cycle; tighten transparency and

political-finance rules; and turn social rights into tangible protections that rebuild trust. Third, broaden participation: close engagement gaps among young people, workers, precarious groups and peripheral regions; equip civil society and municipalities for sustained mobilisation; and make EU governance more legible through clearer communication and easier access to rights.

Accordingly, FEPS's democracy portfolio, in line with priority C of the FEPS FAP 2026, will prioritise: (1) mapping and developing strategies to counter anti-democratic networks; (2) exploring scalable participation infrastructures that plug into decision-making; and (3) sustaining a strong youth and equality lens across all work.

Countering the transnational Far-Right movement

The far right in Europe no longer acts in isolation. Parties, think tanks, media outlets, influencers, and affiliated movements are increasingly embedded in a dense transnational fabric, where ideas, strategies, and resources circulate seamlessly. Digital platforms accelerate this exchange, while international gatherings—from CPAC to NatCom — consolidate alliances and adapt global narratives to national contexts. Debates on migration, gender, or Europe's role in the world may appear domestic, but are often shaped by this cross-border ecosystem. For progressives, the challenge is twofold: to analyse not only national manifestations of far-right politics but also the infrastructures and ideational currents that sustain them. Beginning in 2025 and continuing into 2026, FEPS will advance a dedicated project combining in-depth analysis with strategic foresight. It will aim not only to expose the mechanics of far-right transnationalism but also to develop forward-looking progressive alternatives, directly responding to Priority Three of the FEPS FAP.

Understanding an emerging gender divide in Generation Z

Across Europe, evidence points to an emerging gender divide among Generation Z (16–30), with young women and men diverging in values and political orientations. This trend is most visible on issues such as gender equality, welfare, and support for far-right parties. While young women increasingly embrace progressive positions, some young men appear more receptive to conservative or far-right narratives—linked to shifting labour market dynamics, educational attainment, and the politicisation of gender debates since #MeToo. Yet the extent, causes, and implications of this divide remain insufficiently explored. For progressives, it carries major consequences for electoral behaviour, policy priorities, and communication strategies. To address this, FEPS, together with FES, ETERON and national experts, will lead a project combining survey analysis with qualitative research across five countries. Beginning in 2025, with outputs concentrated in 2026, it will generate critical insights and strategies to engage Gen Z inclusively, aligning with Priority Three's focus on youth and gender equality.

Schielding from further fragmentation of democratic information systems

European public debate is splintering across overlapping platform worlds: professional news reaches fewer people, news avoidance rises, and political talk drifts to creator feeds and private messaging. Algorithmic and monetisation logics reward high-arousal, identity content; far-right networks have adapted fastest, using influencer funnels and memes to pull fringe ideas into the mainstream. Cross-platform virality outpaces institutional voices; accountability journalism loses reach and fact-checks arrive late. In short, deliberation competes on terrain optimised for attention, not comprehension—an inherent uphill battle for progressive, policy-led messages.

In 2026, together with the digital portfolio, we will explore why far-right frames overperform—and what could help progressive messages travel further. Potential avenues include exploring creator collaborations with transparent disclosure; message styles that blend clarity, emotion and dignity; shareable formats; trustworthy first-party channels; and rapid, ethical debunking. This inquiry will in part align with the transnational far-right project under Issue One, but may also go beyond it. It complements Priority Three by adding the “how” of empowering and engaging citizens. The focus on this topic can also help FEPS feed into the debate around a European Commission proposal on the Democratic Shield (expected in autumn 2025), as it touches on critical questions on democratic information ecosystems and protecting it against (EU) internal and external attacks.

Bridging the gap and enabling more participation

One of the central challenges European democracies currently face—and a priority for the FEPS democracy portfolio in 2026—lies in addressing the tension between a widespread sense of loss and a growing sense of political ineffectiveness. For many citizens, everyday life is marked by accumulating deficits—of security, services, time, social status, and environmental quality. At the same time, politics appears ever more expressive and noisy, especially under populist influence, yet too often inconsequential. Voices are raised but rarely converted into visible change. This dynamic fuels cynicism and weakens trust in democracy’s capacity to deliver. Participation outside parliaments has not disappeared. On the contrary, it has shifted into loosely organized, short-lived forms that highlight problems but often fail to generate lasting impact. The key question, therefore, is how to restore political efficacy—the belief that people can act effectively and that institutions will respond. Exploring democratic modes of participation guided by fairness, reciprocity, and reliability—capable of turning diffuse attention into durable democratic capacity and renewing the habit of acting together—will be a central priority for 2026.

Analysing demographic trends and the reasons for a democratic deficit

Europe's unprecedented demographic transformation poses not only social and economic challenges but also significant risks for democracy. Aging societies shift political influence from younger to older cohorts, leading to their interests being overrepresented at the ballot box and within parliaments, governments, and European institutions. Addressing the democratic implications of this imbalance will be a priority for the FEPS democracy portfolio in 2026. This work builds on Priority C of the FAP, which calls for a youth and equality lens in participation, and connects with FEPS's longstanding focus on youth engagement and its newer focus on intergenerational fairness, as well as forthcoming debates on the EU Youth Strategy and the MFF.

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 left the social democratic family second in the European Parliament, which however is a different assembly than its predecessors – much more fragmented, polarised and with a hard right holding considerable power. This makes the S&D family carry immense responsibility as the strongest progressive voice in the so-called grand, pro-European coalition. This alliance is at best fragile, with the centre-right open to agreements with those on the right of them. So, persevering will require from the progressives 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.

While not allowing the further backlash on the core issues, social democrats are working on a new, appealing centre-left project for the future of Europe. The one that could be a viable alternative and compete with the current sharp turn that risks making the EU set the trajectory towards a Defence Union that acts out of defensiveness and narrowly defines sense of necessity. In regions where social democracy has experienced an erosion of support, and the rivalry between center-right and far-right became the main political frontline, there remains a special responsibility for upholding democratic standards and protecting the rule of law.

Social democrats have been facing diverse challenges on the national level as well. The progressing 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 well as altered organisational, communication and campaign strategies. The erosion of *traditional* politics and transformations within the societies go 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 perspectives lays therefore at the core of the preoccupation of FEPS for 2026. And as such will also help bridge the European level conversation (as geared among the others at the PES Congress of Ideas in Amsterdam in 2025) and the respective sister parties and academics' deliberations about the renewal of progressivism in Europe.

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. The longer term ambition here would be to redefine the progressive doctrine of the European integration for the new times.

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, as well as the deliberations within the scope of the Next Left lectures, can be particularly instructive. The innovation here would also be to zoom in the patterns of participation and seek to conduct comparative study about the organisational renewal of the progressive parties across the EU.

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 positioned 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, the 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 when 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 2026 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.
