

**EQUALITY,
SOLIDARITY,
DEMOCRACY**

FOR EUROPE

Executive Summary_ Along with the deepening of the crisis, a belief in the ability of the European project to promote and secure collective well-being has been seriously fractured and undermined. In the countries where austerity is supervised by European institutions, the EU is perceived as responsible for the loss of rights and democracy. Rising regressive populism builds on euro-scepticism. Euro-criticism is increasingly gaining ground even among those who still want to build a common future, but think that the current European project is not delivering upon democracy, social justice and solidarity.

Thus, the growing and widespread European dissatisfaction is not only giving rise to large swathes of protests but also to unfortunate xenophobic and racist views and attitudes. European policies must, therefore, give substance to the values proclaimed in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, and reverse the devastating social and democratic consequences of the policies implemented.

Trust in institutions hits record low, EU decisions suffer from a deficit of legitimacy.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE ASPIRATIONS SEEMS TO BE BROKEN

Along with the deepening of European integration, democratic accountability at national level is challenged due to the transfer of competences and the opacity of the multi-level governance system. Despite the innovations brought by the Lisbon treaty in terms of democratic checks and balances, such as the growing role of the European Parliament and national parliaments in the decision making process or the setting-up of civil dialogue as principle of governance, the democratic gap has widened.

The institutional responses to the crisis led to growing political disaffection. For decades, the market-oriented European policies have addressed citizens mainly as individual-consumers, rather than addressing the collective needs. In the present crisis, this orientation of the public policies has weakened the universal effective access to fundamental rights, as the austerity measures imposed in the weakest countries are detrimental to the well-being of mil-

lions of people. Eurostat records in November 2013 that one quarter of the people within the EU is facing or is at risk of poverty, whilst unemployment rates hit record high. The growing inequalities prompted citizens to question the real added value, if not the very basis, of the EU project.

Over the last decades mainstream European policies have contributed to increasing inequalities and polarisation between the rich and the poor, despite an overall long-term global economic growth. The financial and economic integration has led to a geographical concentration of wealth accumulation in the

strongest countries which economies happened to be the most able to benefit fully from the large scale of the EU market. Along the share of competencies resulting from the present EU Treaties, the social effects of these imbalances are left to be tackled mostly at the national level, with no significant European-wide redistribution of the wealth produced. Richer countries are expected to address the issues with their means, whereas countries facing economic difficulties are left with theirs. In consequence, imbalances are tackled mainly through national fiscal and social dumping policies.

Moreover, the worsening recession is only serving to increase public debt and economic exclusion. Whilst huge public resources (in fact citizens' money) have been devoted to save the financial system, many raise concerns that the behaviours that caused the financial crisis in the first place, are being repeated and continue to damage the general interest.

Citizens who are socially excluded, and the increasing number who are worried about becoming so, are in consequence losing their trust in the political systems supposed to protect them. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise neither that rich territories become reluctant to share wealth with poorer territories, nor that individual and collective anxieties about material security tend to manifest themselves in xenophobic and racist propositions and behaviours.

**POLITICAL
DISENCHANTMENT
AND REGRESSIVE
POPULISM
ARE ON THE RISE**

Building a truly inclusive and cohesive society is crucial for the EU project we need.

Seeking answers to the effect of the crisis and harsh austerity policies, people tend to organise at local level to resist the deprivation of access to their fundamental rights. This shows clearly people's aspiration for the claimed values upon which the Union has been framed and demonstrates their desire for a collective well-being built upon the principle of solidarity.

Nevertheless, these responses in times of crisis are not by themselves able in the long run to address the obstacles for an effective access to rights for all. The future well-being in both Member States and the Union itself depends on the development and implementation of public policies that are capable of promoting and securing a truly inclusive and cohesive society, involving all residents in the EU territory.

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COMBAT POVERTY, SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND UNEMPLOYMENT

European public policies must give effective access to fundamental rights for all residents of Europe, tackle effectively the unequal distribution of power and wealth in the EU and combat poverty, social exclusion and unemployment which are the most powerful catalysts of populism, of xenophobic propositions and acts. This European society must be grounded upon the values of secularisation so that the diversity of identities, beliefs and life stances of its citizens is fully recognised and given equal treatment by the public authorities at local, national and European level.

Economic and Monetary Union sustainability is clearly among the core elements for building a com-

mon future. However, EMU also needs to be supported by EU-wide redistributive policies, including the increase of the budget means for comprehensive cohesion policies. Such policies could be based upon a return to higher own resources and adequate level of transfer from richer to poorer territories/countries, with the aim to foster access to employment, income, health, education, housing, environment, social security for all. In other words, we need common policies to face the national debts' crisis, and thus rebuild a common destiny for the peoples of the EU.

An effective response to Euro-scepticism requires that the following two questions be adequately addressed:

- How will European policies be re-aligned with the principles of solidarity and justice so that they can achieve “social justice”, “solidarity between generations” and “solidarity among Member States” as enshrined within Art. 3 of the Lisbon Treaty?

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- How will the functioning of the European institutions be refreshed to reflect the need for transparency and visible accountability?

At a time of globalisation, the rights of citizens in Europe are intricately connected and interdependent with effective access to rights in the rest of the world. More than ever therefore, Europe has to play its role also in supporting the universal access to rights in emerging and developing countries, the right to peace, education, health, water, food, social security.

**EU WIDE
REDISTRIBUTION
POLICIES
ARE NEEDED**



We call for public policies that give real substance to EU claimed values and pursue the collective objectives of solidarity, equality and democracy.

EUROPE MUST REBALANCE FINANCE AND ECONOMY WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE

Europe is currently facing such social and economic imbalances that their resolution requires deep reflection and changes to clarify and redefine the nature of the European policies underpinning the project itself. The dominant narrative to date is based upon the idea that the crisis does not derive from financial speculation, but from too much public intervention in the economy via public services and social expenditure, combined with an alleged laziness of citizens in the so named “PIIGS” countries (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Spain). It must be repudiated, since it lacks economic evidence and also directly attacks the foundations, philosophy and principles of our European contract.

Europe should move from a market-competition model (a model driven by the exchange of goods, services and the accumulation of capital and which actually leads to fragmentation, social and inter-generational competition, national and regional resentments, fear and tension between natives and migrants, and division between permanent workers, precarious workers and the unemployed) to a social model that is capable of responding to citizens’ aspirations for solidarity, mutual respect and social justice. Such a model should embrace meaningful definition of well-being and rethink the economy so as to make it serve the people and the environment instead of the other way round. It should think beyond GDP, about a fairer and more sustainable distribution of the wealth produced. As opposed to seeking the



global quantitative growth, the economic imperative should be to facilitate a society where all people are able to make a decent living and enjoy well-being.

European leaders should dispel the myth that services of general interest that provide universal access to public goods (e.g. health, education, security, etc.) are detrimental to the viability of markets. If social cohesion is to be strengthened and human dignity respected, European policies must ensure that access to commons does not depend on users' financial capacities but is granted to all in equal and fair manner.

Clearly, the challenges are such that tackling them means the effective and meaningful engagement at all geographical levels, local, national and European, and can only be possible on a democratic basis.

EUROPE SHOULD MAKE EQUALITY, SOLIDARITY AND DEMOCRACY RULE OVER THE MARKET

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When increasing inequalities and social insecurity make people question the European Union's capacity to provide the framework for a better living for all, when European citizens bear the weight of the crisis while financial markets that are origin of this crisis continue to operate essentially as before, Europe must respond by putting people at the core of its building process and as a matter of urgency ensure that equality, solidarity and democracy take precedence over the market.

An effective and healthy democratic society can only be achieved through the inclusion of all its citizens into the public life. This is a prerequisite for ensuring that Europe can be a community with a vision of a shared future, based on a fair, more equal, distribution of wealth, of economic, social and democratic well-being for all. Democracy is a tool that can help redistribute power to those who don't have it. Solidarity and democracy go hand in hand. They progress together, just as they regress together. Today, they need to move forward.



Specific attention must be given to enable, promote and secure the participation and interest of those groups of citizens most at risk of disengaging from democratic processes and who are most likely to face social and economic exclusion. For instance, the risk of exclusion faced by an ageing population or gender inequality, remain major concerns. But also, the dramatically decreasing interest that young people show for the established and formal democratic institutions and processes implies to actively involve them through participatory tools and means in the broad frame of active citizenship.

An effective, healthy and robust democratic society requires recognition of the civil society. When policies are supportive of the aspiration to a better life and shared future, civil society organisations (CSOs) are a major force in helping restore confidence in collective approaches to the problems individual citizens face. CSOs give a voice to the aspirations of citizens and are a decisive antidote to the isolation of individuals and their communities. CSOs' activities, just as trade-unions' actions help to reinforce democracy in our societies by giving meaningful strength to the feeling of belonging to a collective cause and shared concerns. It is essential, especially in times of crisis, to give full and meaningful recognition of their role as advocates and agents for change, of their ability to marshal constructive collective responses when the health of our democracies is being questioned.

EUROPE SHOULD REINTRODUCE A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE LINKING COHESIVE POLICIES AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Those who understand the need for social cohesion policies in our times of crisis must recognise the role of CSOs and support them accordingly. Civic activism is a democratic imperative that helps to ensure effective scrutiny of policy-making institutions including the appropriate and suitable articulation of the economic, social and democratic components of their policy responses. Recognising active citizenship means that there is a genuine dialogue prior to decision making and the implementation of policy. Recognising civic action means that institutions understand the need of welcoming, respecting and favouring active disobedience over passive compliance. Active citizenship based on individuals' participation in the life of the communities they belong to and informed public debates tackling the

important issues are essential pre-requisites for the vitality of democracy in Europe and the legitimacy of its continued development.

The wording of article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty reflects the need for a Europe that enjoys the participation of all its citizens, including third-country nationals, and representative associations in its building process, whereas the freedom of association is incorporated in the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

These supports to the recognition of the role of the organised civil society are conducive to present our claims for:

- A statute for European associations as the concretisation of a basic freedom at the European level;
- Institutional tools for implementing the provisions of paragraphs 2 to 4 of the article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty on participatory democracy and civil dialogue.

Satisfaction given to these claims is essential if political leaders and institutions want to promote and secure the participation of all European citizens and curb the present trend in the increasing disengagement of those citizens from not only the European project but also democracy itself. We look for partners in that direction.

NO CIVIC ACTIVISM?
NO
DEMOCRACY!



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**100 associations and NGOs
in 28 countries**

Standing for a Europe grounded on:
**Solidarity, Human Rights
and Civic Participation**

Active at:
**Local, National and
European Level**

**AN ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP
FOR A RENEWED DEMOCRACY**

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