



The Federalist Debate

Papers on Federalism
in Europe and the World

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Jürgen Habermas: The Last Message

Lucio Levi

Whenever an age of profound crisis such as ours is experienced, the problem of building a new order arises. The last message transmitted to us by Jürgen Habermas is that we have truly reached the sunset of the old liberal-democratic world order and the dawn of a barbaric civilization in which Trump and Putin – the leaders of the guiding powers of the old bipolar world order – speak the same language.

Faced with the decline of democracy in much of the world, even in countries where it seemed most deeply rooted, Habermas never tired of warning first and foremost the Germans, but also Europe and the West, against the temptation to fall back into nationalism, which in Germany bore the sinister name of National Socialism and Nazism. Nor did he ever give up believing in the possibility of reviving the great goals of European and world federalism.

He had been concerned since the time of the Appeal for a United Europe, signed in 2003 with Derrida, about Europe's loss of weight on the international stage. In more recent times he warned Europeans of the dangers of weakening the Euro-Atlantic axis. He continued to ask where the energies had been found that drove progress from barbarism and chaos to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, to the Kantian dream of a universal democracy and a World Federation.

The European Union must have the courage to launch a proposal for political regeneration that makes it possible to develop a foreign and security policy, a common defence, an internal policy that transforms immigration

into a problem to be addressed through collective responsibility, adequate social and environmental policies, and to overcome the obstacle of unanimity that paralyzes political decision-making.

According to Habermas, the European Union is the region of the world that can play a pioneering role in realizing this political design. The creation of international organizations does not imply the abolition of states, but the limitation of their powers and their transformation into organs of a global legal and political system.

The conclusion of this argument is that the ongoing financial, economic, social and environmental crisis has condemned the idea of a self-regulating market and has once again placed on the agenda of world politics the need to establish political powers and rules to govern the market.

Habermas repeatedly stressed that the principle of legitimacy of a multinational community, such as the European Union – and of which the United States and Switzerland are antecedents – cannot be based on a supposed ethnic, linguistic or cultural unity. He insisted that the identity of the European citizen must be founded on constitutional patriotism.

This means that such identity, on the one hand, must have a patriotic nature, affirming that the state and democratic institutions are the highest form of collective life and that values higher than private interest and individual selfishness therefore exist. On the other hand,

however, the identity of the European citizen must free itself from belonging to the nation, understood as a closed entity, in order to affirm loyalty to the universal principles of the rule of law, democratic participation, social and environmental security, and peace.

The concepts used by Habermas – global civil society, cosmopolitan law, domestic world politics, world citizenship – which he never abandoned, even in the face of the return of nationalism, power politics and war, are the coordinates that open the road to the formation of a new international order capable of overcoming internal fragmentation in a world reorganizing itself into large regional blocs.

The rise of Trump to the leadership of the United States has produced a deep fracture in the Western world that has strengthened nationalist, racist, anti-Islamic and antisemitic tendencies. It is a fracture that must be healed on the economic, political, social and environmental levels.

Recent elections held in Hungary highlighted the clash that has divided the West: on one side, the illiberal democracy of Orbán and Trump; on the other, liberal European democracy. The meaning of this division is clear: liberal democracy has won and has enabled the West to take a powerful step forward toward the recomposition of the non-American West.

Edgar Morin: The Global Humanist

Mauro Ceruti

He would have turned 105 on July 8. When he reached the milestone of “his century,” I asked him: how would you define yourself? He replied: a human being, with many roots: of Sephardic Jewish origin, partly Italian and partly Spanish, deeply Mediterranean, European, a citizen of the world, a child of the Earth-Homeland...

These multiple roots were the matrices of both his thought and his life. He was the son of Jews who had immigrated from Spain to Livorno through the diaspora of 1492. In the second half of the nineteenth century, his closest ancestors settled in Thessaloniki, then a predominantly Sephardic city characterized by peaceful multicultural coexistence within the Ottoman Empire. From there, his parents would move to Paris.

These Jewish roots, he said, nevertheless had no cultural content. Not educated in the synagogue, he in a sense “became” Jewish later, in danger, during the Resistance and the Nazi occupation, when Edgar David Nahoum “became” Edgar Morin. After the war, he wanted to keep both surnames officially: Nahoum, known as Morin. In the vicissitudes of his family, he saw the stigmas of European ambivalence (between civilization and barbarism), found a vocation for a plural identity, and developed a rejection of all forms of fundamentalism. He felt himself to be a post-Marrano, “uprooted and multi-rooted,” in the tradition of Montaigne, Cervantes, and Spinoza, who had been subjected to the synagogue’s anathema. Like them, he never forgot his Jewish roots. But he felt himself

to be the child of a cursed people, not of the chosen people. He integrated this memory into his universalist formation, grounding in it a feeling of compassion for all the subjugated, the colonized, and the racially persecuted. He himself defined post-Marranos as “those who, under the effect of the collision between two religions, have gone beyond both and developed a psychological experience that allowed them to rid themselves of dogmas and produce a form of thought woven from questioning and criticism.”

He nourished himself on the Greek and Latin classics and on the Gospels. With Pascal, “his” philosopher above all others, he saw charity as “the sole object of Scripture.” As with Pascal, faith, doubt, reason, and religion fought and nourished one another within him. He too was led to the “wager.” His, however, was a wager on humankind, nourished by an “unfailing attachment to rationality” and by an “awareness of the great Mystery into which the greatest knowledge ultimately flows.” It was a wager that led him to understand the necessity of acting amid uncertainty and the risks faced by all our values, and that led him to recognize himself in the “religion of that which binds,” in the religion of fraternity.

He was the first in his family to be born in France, and he “became” French little by little, through school and through his appropriation of the language and culture. He also “became” a cultural European by regenerating an awareness of Europe’s multiple identity, the hybridization of its cultures, the flexibility of its borders, and the richness of the migrations

that have taken place there and continue to do so. He only began to feel European in the early 1970s, when he realized that "Europe's inhuman colonial power had been lost: Europe had become a poor thing." Although in recent years he confessed to having lost faith in Europe, seeing it so fragmented, subject to technobureaucratic forces, and helpless in the face of migrants and wars, he nevertheless continued to recognize that it was precisely the humanistic culture of our Europe that had rooted within him a profound sense of the common destiny of a "planetary" humanity that is both one and many.

Throughout "his" century of life, Edgar Morin was a protagonist of a century of history. The exceptional nature of its mystery, the exploration of which has been entrusted to us as destiny. It is precisely in the self-reflections on his personal journey that the germ and the profound meaning of his philosophy of complexity are revealed, developed through the monumental and brilliant six-volume work *The Method*.

A few days ago, I asked him: how do you see the future? Uncertain, he replied. And he added, summarizing the core message of *Lessons from a Century of Life* (the title of his testamentary book): "The human adventure has arrived at a gigantic crisis in which our destiny is at stake. Probability favors the worst. But the improbable and the unpredictable are also possible. It seems that Thanatos will be the victor. Yet, whatever happens, our lives can have meaning only by taking the side of Eros." And heartfelt until the end was his appeal: let us wake up! We must change course.

He had never abandoned the desire to settle in the "country where lemons grow." He renewed this desire when, deeply moved, he received the volume *One Hundred Edgar Morins*, which we dedicated to him – one hundred Italian friends

– for his hundredth birthday, to commemorate the hundred and more paths of inquiry and life that he had opened and traveled. Just a few days ago, I had imagined another journey together, through the places of his Italy, his Tuscany, where he lived for long periods in the fraternal conviviality of our community of friends...

His testimony lies in the intertwining of his ways of being a man, a scholar, and a writer. He witnessed, interpreted, and fought against the birth and formation of totalitarian systems. As a very young man, he experienced the Resistance and then immediately became responsible for communications in the provisional government of liberated Berlin, where he wrote his first book, *Germany Year Zero*, which inspired Roberto Rossellini's film of the same name.

His Self-Criticism regarding the communist creed cost him marginalization and humiliation. He was able to identify and interpret unprecedented phenomena in their formative stages: the possibility of humanity's self-annihilation through nuclear weapons, the culture industry, cinema (through his pioneering books, now considered classics, which at the time earned him accusations from academic mandarins of dealing with a "hairstylist's subject"), the development of adolescent culture and May '68 (of which he was the only chronicler "from within" through his famous articles in *Le Monde*), ecological thought (which he outlined in 1970), the end of the Cold War, the new science (through complex thought), the crisis of education (through his pedagogical trilogy, now disseminated throughout the world), globalization (through the idea of Earth-Homeland), climate change, the pandemic, the new wars, and the planetary crisis (through the idea of polycrisis and his *Path for the Future of Humanity*).

He found in self-observation the opportunity

to probe “the living core of the subject,” reflecting on the perverse and blinding power of ideas that become objects of idolatry and end up possessing us, and on the difficulty of resisting self-deception. In his diary writing and essays, among the highest achievements of French literature, he portrayed the human being not as the “microcosm” of the modern vision, placed at the center of the cosmos, but rather as the infinitesimal fragment of a cosmic explosion, impenetrable in its mystery, yet whose exploration has been entrusted to us as destiny. It is precisely in the self-reflections of his personal story that the germ and the profound meaning of his philosophy of complexity are revealed, developed through the monumental and brilliant six-volume work *The Method*.

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Global Citizens Support a World Parliament: Leaders Need to Catch up

George Papandreou

A new global survey¹ delivers a message that policymakers and institutions can no longer afford to ignore: people across the world are ready to discuss the idea of a democratically elected World Parliament and many already support it. They are ahead of their governments when it comes to re-imagining democracy and international politics.

Commissioned by Democracy Without Borders and covering 101 countries representing 90% of the world's population, the survey finds that 40% of people globally support creating a World Parliament to address global issues. Only 27% are opposed, while a significant 33% remain neutral.

For the first time at this scale, we see clear evidence that a relative global majority supports the idea of a citizen-elected World Parliament – not as an abstract utopia, but likely as a response to real and shared challenges: climate breakdown, wars, pandemics, inequality, and the democratic deficit at the global level. Even more striking is that opposition globally remains a minority, while a large share of citizens remain open, undecided, and ready for dialogue.

What stands out most powerfully is who supports this idea. Support is strongest among young people, among those with fewer economic and political privileges, among ethnic minorities, and among citizens living in regions that have historically been marginalized in global decision-making. In other words, those

who experience exclusion most directly are calling most clearly for democratic inclusion – not less democracy, but more.

Equally revealing is where skepticism is strongest: in wealthy, stable democracies that have long held disproportionate influence over global institutions. This is not to be seen as a rejection of democracy. It is a reminder that privilege may breed complacency, and that those who benefit from existing arrangements may underestimate how urgently democratic change is needed.

One third of respondents worldwide chose a neutral position. This is not apathy. It is a democratic opening. It signals unfamiliarity, not hostility, of a public that has not yet been invited into a serious conversation about how global decisions are made, and who gets to shape them.

But whatever the case, the data from this survey highlights a common desire: to either gain or to maintain empowered voices. That is a democratic demand.

These findings matter deeply at a time when authoritarianism is advancing and multilateral institutions such as the UN are under strain. It disputes the view that citizens somehow are in search of an authoritarian saviour.

It reminds us that democracy remains humanity's most powerful shared aspiration – including at the global level.

People living under restricted freedoms see global democratic representation not as a threat to sovereignty, but as a potential extension of their rights and dignity. That alone should challenge many assumptions held in established capitals.

A World Parliament is not a finished blueprint. It is a democratic challenge. A challenge to think in new and innovative ways about how democracy can serve us at a global scale. Democracy is alive when we ask the right questions and do so together. The survey demonstrates readiness for debate, for imagination, and for institutional courage.

The challenge is clear. We can continue to gov-

ern a deeply interconnected world with structures designed for another century, leading to catastrophe – or we can listen to the voices captured in this survey and begin the hard, hopeful work of democratizing globalization itself.

The future of democracy will not be saved by nostalgia for national institutions alone. It will be secured by extending democratic principles and culture wherever power is exercised – including globally.

This survey shows that the world's citizens are ready to have that conversation.

Now it is time for leaders to catch up.

¹ See <https://www.democracywithoutborders.org/40121/global-survey-citizens-in-most-countries-lean-toward-a-world-parliament/>

Extreme Wealth Inequality is Threatening Democracy, Reports Warn

Democracy Without Borders

Recent assessments warn that the global concentration of wealth keeps increasing and threatens democracy. According to a report¹ by Oxfam, “The world is not approaching a crucial tipping point: we are in it.” Global billionaire wealth has reached 18.3 trillion US dollars, the report says, an 81% increase in real terms since 2020. Over the past year alone, billionaire fortunes grew by 16.2%, three times faster than the average annual rate since 2020. An expert committee² mandated by the South African G20 presidency last year described inequality as an emergency. A report it presented in November 2025 states that between 2000 and 2024, the richest 1% increased their wealth 2,655 times more than the bottom 50%. The number of billionaires now exceeds 3,000 globally and they hold wealth equivalent to 14.1% of global GDP, up from 2.5% in 1990, the committee noted. The World Inequality Report 2026³, published shortly after the G20 committee report, reaches a similar conclusion about the persistence of extreme disparities. It finds that global income inequality remains at very high levels and emphasizes that these outcomes are shaped by political and institutional choices rather than economic inevitability. The report warns that such concentration risks undermining democratic accountability and social cohesion. The G20 committee confirms that global income inequality remains extremely high, with a global income Gini coefficient of 0.61. It reports that 83% of countries, accounting for 90% of the

world’s population, have high income inequality, defined as a Gini above 0.4. Oxfam emphasized that the wealth surge at the top coincides with widespread hardship. For instance, one in four people globally faces moderate or severe food insecurity, and 2.6 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet. The G20 committee report notes that food insecurity is up by 335 million people since 2019. All three reports link these wealth imbalances to democratic challenges. Oxfam cites research showing that more unequal countries are up to seven times more likely to experience democratic erosion. The G20 committee similarly finds that countries with high inequality are more likely to experience democratic decline. It warns that inequality erodes trust in institutions, fuels political polarization, and translates into political inequality through concentrated media ownership and campaign finance power. Oxfam argues that extreme wealth has become “a direct threat to political freedom.” The G20 committee recommended in its report the creation of an International Panel on Inequality, modeled on the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The proposed body would provide governments with independent assessments of inequality trends, policy impacts and recommendations. Last month, the World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report 2026⁴ identified inequality as one of the most interconnected global risks, linking it to social fragmentation, political instability, and weakened governance.

¹ See <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/resisting-rule-rich>

² See <https://ipdcolumbia.org/event/landmark-g20-report-led-by-nobel-laureate-joseph-stiglitz-sounds-alarm-on-inequality-emergency-and-calls-for-international-panel-on-inequality/>

³ See <https://wid.world/news-article/world-inequality-report-2026-inequality-persist-at-a-very-extreme-level/>

⁴ See <https://www.democracywithoutborders.org/40493/risk-reports-outline-rising-global-confrontation-and-uncertainty/>

A Project for Democratic Forces: the Constitutionalization of the UN

Luigi Ferrajoli

The meeting of progressive leaders from all over the world, promoted these days in Barcelona by President Pedro Sánchez to agree on a common response to the authoritarian regression of our democracies and to violations of international law, is in itself a first step toward building an alternative to the far right. It is clear that this alternative cannot ignore the two terrible scourges that are the effects of that regression: the illegal wars of aggression launched by Putin, Netanyahu, and Trump, which risk degenerating into a nuclear conflict, and the lack of measures aimed at addressing global warming, which, if not halted, will render the Earth uninhabitable.

It is not enough, in the face of these scourges, to lament the collapse of the international order and the blindness of our right-wing governments, united by their denial of the ecological issue – “the greatest hoax in history,” as Donald Trump has called it. Nor is it sufficient to defend the existing international law and its current institutions, whose failure has made their total impotence and inadequacy evident. A rational and realistic response to this failure, on the part of the democratic forces gathered in Barcelona, should consist in a project for the constitutional re-founding of the United Nations, one that imposes legal limits and constraints, in the interest of all, on the current savage powers of nuclear states and global markets. This constitutionalization of the UN can occur only through the introduction of a complex system of guarantees, without which the universal principles proclaimed in so many

international charters – peace, environmental protection, and equality in human rights – are merely words, unfulfilled promises.

We are living through the most dramatic period in history. At a time when the scourge of nuclear danger and that of ecological catastrophe would require an increase in the governing capacity of politics and in the safeguarding role of law, the triumph of the right in much of the West has produced the simultaneous development of two forms of absolutism: political absolutism, due to the autocratic regression of many democracies and the absence of limits on governmental powers; and economic absolutism, due to the concentration of wealth and the absence of limits on market powers. Humanity has fallen into the hands of small groups of autocrats and multibillionaires who accept no limits to their power. The president of the greatest military power, Donald Trump, has declared that he recognizes no limits other than those he sets himself.

Hence, in a world dominated by the law of the strongest, by the logic of the enemy, and by contempt for the law, the danger of a nuclear holocaust. Hence the worsening ecological catastrophe looming over our planet, given that each year more carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere than in the previous one. If there is no awakening of reason, humanity is destined to become extinct, due to global warming, amid atrocious suffering. Our grandchildren will not be able to forgive us,

nor even understand the irresponsibility and stupidity of our generations, which will have left them a planet transformed into a hell.

These are the problems that the democratic forces gathered in Barcelona should address. What is needed is a historic turning point, which only such forces can promote: the transformation of the UN Charter into a Constitution of the Earth, whose supremacy over every other source, national or international, is guaranteed by a Global Constitutional Court. There are three universal values – because they are in the interest of all – that only a Constitution of the Earth is capable of guaranteeing: first, peace, through the constitutional prohibition, as crimes against humanity, of the production and trade of all weapons, not only nuclear weapons but also ordinary firearms; second, the natural environment, through the ban on the use of

fossil fuels and the protection of vital natural goods – drinking water, major forests, major glaciers – as assets of a planetary public domain removed from commodification and depletion; third, equality, through the creation of global institutions guaranteeing the rights to health, education, and subsistence for all human beings.

This is not a utopia. It is the concrete implementation of principles already enshrined in the UN Charter and in the many human rights charters, but which have remained mere words on paper because they lack guarantees. It is the implementation of these principles that constitutes the leap in civilization that the progressive leaders of 40 countries, gathered for the first time in Barcelona, should propose and demand. In the interest of all – poor and rich, weak and powerful: the survival of humanity on the only planet we have is at stake. mf, nv

(*) We open here a dialogue on the perspective of a Constitution for the Earth, as a constitutional reform of the United Nations system, taking occasion from the article of the jurist and philosopher Luigi Ferrajoli, published in Spanish for *El País*, on the occasion of the “Global Progressive Mobilization” in Barcelona, where on April 17 and 18, 2026 gathered, over five thousands activist and leaders from over 40 countries from all over the world, with the aim to counter the nationalistic forces through a renewed international coordination of progressive democratic organizations, under invitation of Pedro Sanchez, Spain’s Prime Minister and President of the Socialist International Pedro Sanchez, of whom we publish the speech there delivered, alongside the one by Ignacio Lula da Silva, President of Brazil. This event has to be regarded with much attention from the federalist forces: the political struggle is apparently finally starting to reach the scale of the World - beyond the national state representations - towards the times of the needed planetary politics - for the common good of humanity. (mf, nv)

In Defense of Democracy*

Pedro Sanchez

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to Barcelona, to Catalonia, to Spain.

Let me begin with a simple thought. The fact is, if we are here today, it is because we share a concern. A concern, but above all, we share a responsibility.

There is an old distinction between looking out the window or going out into the street when something happens. Concern involves observing. Responsibility involves taking action. And we are here today, of course, to observe. But above all, we are here to respond, to take action.

This is the fourth meeting of the “In Defense of Democracy” initiative. What began as a forum for dialogue launched by President Lula, Chilean President Gabriel, the President of Colombia, and the President of Uruguay -what began, as I said, as a forum for dialogue- is today something far more significant. It is a political community in the making, a group of countries willing to do whatever is necessary to protect and strengthen the democratic system.

Because the context is clear: democracy cannot be taken for granted.

We are witnessing attacks on the multilateral system, one attempt after another to challenge the rules of international law, and a dangerous normalization of the use of force. And within our societies, inequality is on the rise. Disinformation erodes trust in governments and, consequently, in our democratic institutions.

That is the real risk facing all societies, all nations: that democracy will be hollowed out from within while it is under attack from without.

And that is why our response cannot be merely defensive. It is not enough to simply resist. We must take the initiative. We must lead. We must demonstrate that democracy is not only defended, but also strengthened and refined day by day.

That is the spirit of this meeting. And that is why we have identified three major priorities that are, in fact, part of a single agenda.

The first is multilateralism.

We believe in a rules-based international order, in cooperation, and in legitimate institutions. But we also know that the multilateral system is in urgent need of reform, and we must undertake a thorough overhaul.

We know that it can only survive if it reforms to reflect the reality of the 21st-century world, as President Lula has often said. It must become more effective, more efficient, more transparent, more democratic, more inclusive, and more representative. In short, it must embody the values we uphold within this group.

That is why we believe the time has come for the United Nations to be revitalized, reformed, and -why not?- led by a woman. It is not just a matter of justice -though that is certainly part of it- but also a matter of credibility.

Alongside the multilateral agenda, the second priority is digital governance.

I believe this is a concern shared by all of us government representatives gathered around this table. Technology can undoubtedly be a tool for progress, but it does not govern itself, nor do all the interests at stake point in the same direction. Without rules, technology divides us and makes us more dependent.

Therefore, we cannot accept that misinformation should continue to shape our societies as it currently does, nor can we accept that it should shape public discourse in our countries, or that algorithms should reward hatred, polarization, confrontation, and violent messages, or that technological power should remain outside democratic control.

A little over a year ago, at an international forum, Spain declared loud and clear: "Let's make social media great again." And we've been doing just that ever since. We are pushing a legislative agenda to hold platforms and their executives accountable, to crack down on algorithmic manipulation and the spread of illegal content, and to measure and combat the impact of hate and polarization. And we will protect, of course, our children and our youth by limiting their access to social media.

The Digital Democracy Roundtable, dear friends, kicks off here in Barcelona with a side event to share experiences and coordinate our efforts to improve digital governance. In doing so, we are fulfilling the commitment we made in New York, President Lula, last September.

There is one thing that, in my opinion, we must be clear about: the Internet knows no borders, and therefore, either we move forward together or no one will move forward. Either we establish common rules, or others will

impose them, because the digital space is either democratic or it will not be at all.

And finally, the third priority we have set for this meeting—one we all fully agree on—is the fight against inequality. Because inequality, in addition to being unjust, is hardly compatible with healthy, strong democracies.

When progress isn't shared, when opportunities aren't available to everyone, when large segments of the population feel that the system isn't working for them, democracy loses its legitimacy. That's where extremism thrives, it's true, but extremism doesn't create the divide; what it does is fill the void.

That is why our democratic agenda is also an agenda for social justice. We are committed to social cohesion, equal opportunities, youth participation, gender equality, and more inclusive societies.

And this is where I believe the work of the International Panel on Inequality—launched by President Ramaphosa during his G20 presidency—along with that of such prominent Nobel laureates as Joseph Stiglitz and the Multilateral Observatory on Youth and Extremism, can make the greatest impact, provided they receive the support they need.

I'll conclude, colleagues, by sharing the following.

What unites us is more than just a diagnosis; it is a vision. And what will enable us to move forward is not only the conviction that this is necessary, but the certainty that we are forging a path together.

We share the view that democracy is the best system for addressing the complexity of our societies, for organizing them, and for ensuring their fair progress. We are also convinced that our democracies must adapt

and renew themselves to better meet the demands of our time. And I know that here in Barcelona, we will take another step forward in joining forces.

I would like to welcome the governments that are joining this meeting for the first time. I would also like to thank the President of Mexico for offering to host the next Summit in Defense of Democracy, once we have all agreed on a date for 2027.

I will conclude by saying that I believe the time has come to move beyond the commitment

we all share and take concerted action, to strengthen this alliance, to deliver results, and to restore hope within our societies. As I said at the beginning, it is time to move from window to the street - and thus not just observe but act - I believe the time has come to confront fear with more democracy and inequality with more justice.

Thank you very much for coming.

We would like to welcome you all and your delegations back to this wonderful city of Barcelona.

* Speech by the President of the Government of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, at the IV Meeting In Defense of Democracy, Barcelona, 18th April, 2026. Transcript edited by the Spanish State Secretariat for Communication. Original speech in Spanish. Non official translation. Source: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/presidente/intervenciones/Paginas/2026/20260418-defense-of-democracy-summit-speech.aspx>

Democracy Is Not a Destination - It Is a Daily Construction*

Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva

[...] What we are doing here is the beginning of a movement that must act every single day, every week, every month, 365 days a year, so that we can restore the most sacred thing in the world: democracy and multilateralism. The name of this initiative, Global Progressive Mobilization, says a lot. Each of these three words carries a program of action. It is important to understand what it means. People want to eat – to eat well, to live well, to have quality schools, quality hospitals, a serious and responsible climate policy, strong environmental protection. They want a clean and healthy world, a dignified job with a balanced workload, a salary that allows a decent life. The far right has managed to capitalize on the frustration of unfulfilled promises of neoliberalism. It exploits people's anger by spreading lies – about women, Black people, LGBTQ+ people, immigrants – turning the most vulnerable into targets of hate. Our role is to point to the real culprits. Billionaires concentrate most of the world's wealth. They want people to believe that anyone can get there. They feed the fallacy of meritocracy, but they kick away the ladder so others do not have the same opportunity to climb. They pay less taxes or none at all. They exploit workers, destroy nature, manipulate algorithms. Inequality is not a fact – it is a political choice. What makes us progressives is choosing equality. Our motto must always be to stand on the side of the people. This struggle needs to be global. It is useless to keep our house in order in a world in disorder.

The lords of war drop bombs on women and children, spend billions of dollars on weapons

that could be used to end hunger, solve the energy problem and the health problem. The Global South pays the price for wars it did not provoke and for climate changes it did not cause. It is treated as the backyard of the great powers, suffocated by abusive tariffs and unpayable debts. It is once again seen as a mere supplier of raw materials. To be progressive in the international arena is to defend a reformed multilateralism. It is to defend that peace prevails over force. It is to fight hunger and protect the environment. It is to restore the credibility of the UN that has been eroded by the irresponsibility of its permanent members. It is to create a system in which the rules apply to everyone, in which developed and developing countries stand on equal footing in the Security Council, the World Bank, the IMF and the World Trade Organization. This is not only an effort of governments. The internet has become a battlefield. Disputing the virtual networks is unavoidable, but the dispute must go beyond the screens, it must be taken to universities, churches, unions, associations, neighborhoods and society as a whole. [...] Pope Leo XIV said that democracy risks becoming a mask for the domination of economic and technological elites. Our role is to unmask these forces, to unmask those who say they are on the side of the people but govern for the richest, who claim to be patriots but put sovereignty up for sale and call for sanctions against their own country, who proclaim they defend the family but turn a blind eye to violence against women and the sexual abuse of children, who claim to own the truth but spread lies and disinformation,

who present themselves as men of God but have no love for their neighbor, who speak of freedom but persecute those who are different. [...] As the poet said: "The path is made by walking." Democracy is not a destination – it is a daily construction. It must go beyond voting and bring concrete benefits to people's lives. There is no democracy when a father does not know where to get his next meal. There is no democracy when a mother spends hours on a crowded bus and cannot give her children a goodnight kiss.

There is no democracy when someone is discriminated against because of the color of their skin, when a woman dies simply for being a woman. We must replace discouragement with dreams, hatred with hope. The global progressive mobilization has an important mission: to recover the capacity to project a better future – a future with social justice, equality and democracy. These three terms – global, progressive, mobilization – must go together, not as slogans, but as a living reality. [...] Now I look at what is happening in the world. The United Nations, created after World War II to maintain peace, has become paralyzed

by the power of its permanent members. Today we are living with more armed conflicts than at any time since World War II. [...] So I say to the leaders of the world: fulfill your responsibility to guarantee peace. Stop this madness of war – the world cannot take it anymore. The poor do not want much. They do not want to take anything from the rich. They want a decent job, a decent home, access to education, healthcare, and opportunities for their children. That is all. Everything we want is already written – in the Bible, in constitutions, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. So why is it not fulfilled? I will finish by saying this: I am 80 years old, and I want to live to 120 to prove one thing – we do not grow old because of time passing. What makes us old is losing motivation, losing a cause. If we wake up every day with a cause, we do not grow old. My cause is democracy. My cause is freedom. My cause is equality. My cause is dignity for all people. I do not want war. I want peace, love and fraternity. My weapon is argument. My weapon is reason. Even if I am poor, I have something essential: character, honesty and dignity. That is what allows us to respect everyone. Thank you.

* Speech by the President of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva, at the IV Meeting In Defense of Democracy, Barcelona, 18th April, 2026. Excerpt from: <https://advocatetanmoy.com/complete-lula-speech-in-english-democracy-global-south-and-justice/>

Board of Peace and the Attack to UN and Multilateralism

Fausto Correra

The 21st century's most audacious challenge to the post-1945 international order emerged not from a revolutionary manifesto but from a UN Security Council resolution. On November 17, 2025, Resolution 2803 authorized the creation of a *Committee for the Administration of Gaza*, inadvertently providing the legal foundation for Donald Trump's Board of Peace. What began as a technical mechanism for post-conflict stabilization in Gaza has metamorphosed into a global governance experiment that fundamentally questions the principles of multilateralism, sovereign equality, and international law. This is not merely an institutional innovation but a deliberate assault on the United Nations system and the very concept of collective security.

UNSC Resolution 2803 (Nov. 17, 2025) endorsed Trump's 20-point Gaza plan, authorizing a stabilization force but ambiguously allowing a supporting body alongside the Palestinian-led NCAG. Trump seized this to create a permanent global institution. His inner circle launched it at Davos on Jan. 16, 2026, with fewer than 20 states. The Board institutionalizes inequality through *pay-to-play* membership, lacks judicial independence, and weights power by financial contribution: a corporate governance that commodifies peace and monetizes sovereignty.

Trump's Board extends *America First* to global governance, embodying Trumpism's ideals: the rejection of constraints on American power, the belief that international cooperation

should serve narrow national interests, and the conviction that traditional allies are free-riders. It represents unilateral multilateralism: a system where the United States sets the rules, selects the participants, and retains ultimate authority. Whether the Board is a tool for U.S. hegemony or a genuine alternative to multilateralism is a false dichotomy. It is both. The Board enables Trump to project leadership while bypassing UN constraints, coinciding with \$2.2 billion in US UN arrears, a deliberate financial squeeze. The message is clear: serve American interests efficiently or be replaced.

Permanent membership requires a \$1 billion contribution, a sum that effectively excludes most of the world's states. The 28 members include the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Hungary, Israel, but no Palestinian entity of any kind is invited to this Gaza-focused body. The Executive Board includes Trump loyalists (Rubio, Kushner, Witkoff) alongside international figures like Tony Blair, former UN mediator Nickolay Mladenov, World Bank President Ajay Banga, and billionaire Marc Rowan. Trump is lifetime chairman with absolute veto and the unelected Board faces no accountability. The Board's mandate has expanded to promoting stability and durable peace in all conflict-affected regions. An International Stabilization Force (20,000 troops, 12,000 police) enforces decisions, with Mladenov as on-ground coordinator.

The Board of Peace directly challenges multilateralism's foundations. It inverts the

UN's collective decision-making by replacing egalitarian deliberation with financial capacity as the primary criterion for influence, unlike the WTO's *most-favored-nation* treatment or the ICC's legal universality. It undermines Westphalian sovereignty, transforming states from equal legal entities into shareholders with voting rights proportional to capital contribution. With a private charter, opaque processes, and undefined relationship to international law, the EU has questioned its UN Charter compatibility, while legal scholars argue it operates in a normative vacuum, unconstrained by international humanitarian or human rights law.

The Board of Peace does not appear to be a replacement for the UN, but rather a rival governance model that seeks to render the UN obsolete. Where the UN's universal membership ensures legitimacy but slows decision-making, the Board's exclusive membership promises speed at the cost of representativeness. While the UN derives its authority from near-universal participation and the principle of sovereign equality, the Board, by contrast, lacks democratic credentials. Its members are self-selected based on financial capacity and political alignment with Washington. The absence of major powers like China, Russia, and most European states underscores its limited global acceptance.

The Board of Peace exposes a central geopolitical paradox: the liberal order's leading critics are simultaneously its greatest beneficiaries and most determined underminers. Trump, Putin, and Xi each present distinct yet complementary challenges. Trump's transactional, US-centric approach treats international institutions as mere instruments, with his Board of Peace embodying a club-based model where members pay for influence and America retains ultimate control. His invitation to Putin despite the Ukraine war reveals a *realpolitik* worldview: peace as financial transaction, not as a moral condition. Putin and

Xi, while critical of Western-led multilateralism, offer regional alternatives (BRICS expansion, Belt and Road) rather than global governance reform, and both remain cautious about Trump's initiative. All three undermine multilateralism without providing viable alternatives that preserve collective security. Their respective models (Trump's Board, Putin's spheres of influence, Xi's regional hegemony) represent imperial governance, concentrating rather than sharing power. The result is a world shifting from multilateral cooperation toward multipolar competition, with each pole seeking to maximize its own advantage.

From a federalist perspective, the Board of Peace represents the antithesis of democratic governance, systematically violating its core principles. Subsidiarity gives way to centralized control, democratic representation to financial contribution, and the rule of law to the rule of power. The federalist critique extends to systemic implications: by operating outside international law, the Board accelerates fragmentation and legitimizes powerful states opting out of collective systems, undermining the universality that gives multilateral institutions their moral authority. Yet it also presents an opportunity by exposing real crises: the UN Security Council's veto system does paralyze collective action, and the organization's bureaucratic structures are often ineffective. The federalist response is reform, not abandonment: completing the EU federalization, demanding UN Charter amendments for a Parliamentary Assembly, reforming Security Council veto powers, and establishing regional federations to counterbalance great powers. Money buys participation but not legitimacy, which requires democratic consent, legal consistency, and moral credibility. The federalist path is democratic power distribution through reformed multilateralism, not concentration in imperial structures.

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EU-Mercosur: A Federalist Perspective

Fernando Iglesias

Among the many topics absent today from the federalist debate, there is one that seems fundamental to me: the agreement between Mercosur and the European Union. This initiative, negotiations for which began 26 years ago, involves the creation of the world's largest unified market between two regional blocs that are the only ones that respect the federalist integration model, which combines economic and political union.

Federal Model and Democratic Values

Many other initiatives of regional cooperation and integration do exist globally, but none combine these two aspects like the European Union and Mercosur, which was created in the 1980s in the EU's image and likeness. Although the extensive efforts made over these years have not yet reached perfect results (democracy in the region is highly imperfect), Mercosur remains a territory of peace where republican institutions, freedom, and the rule of law are considered fundamental values regardless of the different national performances in these fields. In addition, the bloc expels those who – like the Venezuela of Chávez and Maduro currently – deny these values and massively violate human rights.

When the current situation shows a worrying regression of freedom and democracy on the global stage, Europe and Latin America are the two regions with the highest number of democratic governments in the world. Consequently, their political proximity could become a vital reference point in the near future, particularly if the battle for hegemony between the United

States and China grows more bitter. Strong reasons to stay close.

The Federalist Silence

The absence of federalist voices in this debate is therefore incomprehensible, as is the lack of a unified federalist position in favor of the agreement between the two regions that best represent federalist values in the world. This becomes even more surreal when considering that the last obstacle to its final approval resides in the most federalist of the EU institutions: the European Parliament, where a small minority of far-right and far-left nationalists oppose the EU-MS agreement, claiming to represent the European people.

From my position, I cannot interfere in the internal affairs of the EU, but nothing prevents me from asking a few questions. Let me do it in Carl Sagan's style:

- Who speaks for the European people? We know who speaks for the agricultural sector, which deserves all our respect but represents 1.6% of EU production and 4% of EU jobs. But who speaks for the other 98.4% of EU production and 96% of European workers who would greatly benefit from the opening of the South American market? Farmers on tractors say something. What do tractor factories and their workers say? Nobody knows.
- Who speaks for innovation? We know who speaks for the rural world and its traditions, but who speaks for technologically

advanced companies and the most forward-looking parts of the European economy, which – as the Draghi and Letta reports show – are losing ground to global competitors and urgently need new trade allies and enlarged markets?

- Who speaks for the consumers? We know who speaks for the 4% of the EU workforce, but who speaks for the 100% of the European population, who are all food consumers? For years, European consumers have eaten meat and agricultural products from Mercosur without any health debacle (meanwhile, Europe suffered major sanitary trouble such as the mad cow epidemic). Now, who speaks for those who pay for the most expensive food and the highest taxes in the world, 35% of which goes to the agricultural sector? Who speaks for the increasing number of Europeans who cannot afford meat on their daily menu?
- Finally, we know those who speak on behalf of the environment. But who really speaks for the Amazon? If you were the Amazon, would you prefer to be preserved through the EU control mechanisms that already exist and work – and that the agreement aims to strengthen – or to fall into Chinese hands, which will be the Amazon's inevitable future if the EU-MS agreement fails?

Geopolitics First

The current outcry over increased Mercosur meat imports – a projected total of one 200g fillet per year per European inhabitant – is a joke. Chinese cars are the true danger to the European economy, and the existential risk for Europe is not about tractors on the Champs Élysées, but Putin's tanks. As security agencies have stated, they could reach the Champs

Élysées by 2030 if Europe does not wake up. This is also why the Mercosur agreement is necessary for Europe: to increase the geopolitical relevance of both blocs and secure the vital supply chains for energy and food that Europe already needs – and would need even more in the event of a conflict.

Unfortunately, this long-term political vision, consistent with the federalist tradition, has been obscured by a short-term economist discourse focused on trade and fueled by fake news that prioritizes fears over facts and rhetoric over reality.

The Risks of Failure

Externally, if this agreement is not reached, the European Union will send a message to the world that its leaders do not understand how isolated and endangered Europe is. Internally, it will signal that EU institutions are not betting on their most modern and competitive sectors, but on the opposite ones. For Mercosur, if the agreement fails, the risks of collapse are extremely high because one of its major countries is leaning toward the BRICS and the other toward the United States, while Uruguay and Paraguay keep dreaming of their own Brexit.

Then, what's the situation right now? With the approval of the agreement by the EU Commission, the EU Council, and the Mercosur countries, and after its provisional entry into force the first of May, only the European Court of Justice resolution on the correctness of the entire process and the final vote of the European Parliament remain as possible obstacles to a definitive approval. As the favorable opinion of the Court is almost guaranteed, the European Parliament has the floor. Paradoxically, we have yet to see if the Parliament of Spinelli will destroy Mercosur, the only regional integration process in the

world that resembles the European one. A real tragedy for Mercosur, for the EU, and for the world.

Finally, what are the reasons for the absence of a strong federalist voice in this debate? Regrettably, I believe many federalists have been overtaken by the vision that Altiero Spinelli declared obsolete in the most

significant line of the Manifesto: the old divisive line between the Right and the Left, which has led them to an ideological approach instead of a federalist one: a clear support for the two historical experiences that remain federalism's main contribution to world peace and human prosperity.

Let's change it. We still have time.

A Feminist Federalist Project for Europe

Melanie Thut

Ursula Hirschmann already knew that women's liberation must be considered alongside the project of a united Europe. The Feminist Federalist Project, initiated in 2025 by young federalists from Italy and Germany, aims to revive Hirschmann's initiative 'Femmes pour l'Europe' 50 years after its launch and to integrate intersectional feminist thinking into federalism discourses. In these times of crisis for democracy, rising nationalism, the retraditionalisation of images of women and worldwide revolutionary movements led by women, this perspective is needed more than ever. Until now, feminist theory has rarely been incorporated into the discourse on federalism as a political and social project. This article argues that a feminist federalist project offers a transformative vision of federalism grounded in equality, inclusion and shared power. To this end, it first presents the intersection of feminist and federalist thinking, outlines democratic and political implications, and discusses the relevance for contemporary federalist debate.

The feminist federalist project combines key insights from feminism and federalism into a unified framework for democratic governance and social transformation. Putting feminism and federalism into perspective means linking the struggle for liberation with a political structure capable of sustaining it: a federal society and a state that institutionalizes freedoms and rights. From a feminist perspective, power is understood as relational and gendered, shaped by intersecting forms of inequality; intersectionality therefore becomes central in recognizing the specific struggles of different groups, particularly women. Feminist theory further emphasizes

the importance of care, social reproduction, and inclusive participation, which are frequently marginalized in conventional political models. From a federalist perspective, core principles include shared sovereignty, multilevel democracy, and the protection of diversity. Federalism is conceived not as a hierarchical system but as a cooperative arrangement based on collaboration rather than domination. Rather than constituting a new wave of feminism, the feminist federalist project functions as a political instrument that enables feminist struggles to be pursued more effectively. Nation-states and patriarchal systems tend to centralize power and divide societies, while both feminism and federalism seek to distribute power more equally through decentralization and participatory governance. Nationalism often reinforces inequality, for instance by instrumentalizing women's bodies for demographic or ideological purposes or by restricting political rights. Feminist federalism counters this logic by opening political space for diverse identities and shared authority. In the convergence of these two perspectives, federalism is reshaped by feminist principles: autonomy is linked with solidarity, equality with diversity, and decentralization with social cohesion rather than fragmentation. At its core lie peace, non-violent coexistence, and the conviction that all individuals should be able to live in freedom and security and fully realize their potential. Federal thinking also broadens the understanding of politics by bringing decision-making closer to those affected, particularly at the local level, where women are often strongly networked and deeply engaged in their communities. The central claim of a feminist federalist project is thus that

it redefines federalism as a democratic system grounded in inclusive citizenship and social justice.

What This Means for Democracy and Politics

A feminist federalist perspective is highly relevant to contemporary federalist debates in the European Union and the broader global context, as it connects normative theory with pressing political challenges. The EU continues to face a persistent democratic deficit alongside recurring crises of solidarity triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, migration, war, and climate change. At the same time, nationalist and anti-federalist narratives have gained momentum, reinforcing exclusionary notions of sovereignty and hierarchical governance. Feminist federalism offers an alternative framework by redefining federal integration as a project grounded not only in markets and institutions but in care, equality, and shared responsibility. In doing so, it strengthens democratic legitimacy through inclusive participation and recognition of marginalized voices, while promoting social cohesion across political and social levels. A concrete illustration of this approach is the European Citizens' Initiative *My Voice, My Choice*, which advocates for safe and accessible abortion rights and has collected over 1.2 million signatures across Europe. Feminists from numerous countries mobilized a federal instrument to act collectively where national governments have failed, demonstrating how a European umbrella can empower feminist demands beyond state borders and generate significant public visibility. This example shows how feminist federalism can function as a practical political strategy ideally anchored in a more genuinely federal Europe. Beyond the European context, feminist movements in regions such as Rojava further demonstrate

the global relevance of this approach. There, a confederal system among different ethnic groups, including Kurds, has established a multi-ethnic political structure that actively includes minorities and challenges patriarchal power relations. Engagement with these ideas, for instance through initiatives such as the Israeli-Palestinian Federalist Peace Forum, illustrates that feminist federalism is not confined to Europe but represents a globally applicable normative and political framework for peace, inclusion, and democratic coexistence.

Ways forward

One year on from its founding, where do we stand with the Feminist Federalist Project? Through our online article series in the multilingual magazine *The New Federalist*, we initially explored the intersection of feminism and federalism, shedding light on the forgotten stories of feminist federalists such as Petra Kelly and Katharina Focke. Further areas to explore include a deeper examination of existing concepts, such as the confederalism model in Rojava and local feminist care practices, like those of the Saharawi. Ideas from the feminist movement in Iran are another area to explore. It is important to recognise that a feminist federalist perspective must be global because achieving freedom for all requires transnational solidarity.

However, questions concerning the intersection of the private and the political, transnational European care economies and other intersectional issues, such as race, class and religion, will also be highly relevant. Ultimately, the project aims to open up new spaces for imagining the future of a federal Europe and world order, and to serve as a political platform for realising this vision.

How Do We Back the Future?

Giulio Saputo

Decivilization

With the Trump-led dismantling of the international order, competitive nationalism and protectionism are now setting the pace in a world marked by conflict. What we are experiencing is not so much the dangers of “deglobalization,” but rather what Horkheimer calls “decivilization,” in which individualization, once a factor of progress, has become an element of reaction (we have moved from autonomy to authoritarianism), leading us into a new form of barbarization. The process that had transformed French peasants into “citizens” and immigrants into “Americans” has been reversed. Globalization has shifted the boundaries between civil society, new social actors, and the state. Numerous actors have gained increasing freedom of action from the regulatory power of institutions, creating the need to restore the supremacy of politics at the supranational level.

Between Light and Shadow

In response to the limitations of national politics, millions of non-governmental organizations have emerged around the world, forming a new civil society that plays a crucial role in mobilizing public opinion. The end of the great utopias and ideologies is nothing more than a self-fulfilling prophecy, fueled by a postmodern skepticism that in reality conceals a conservative impulse. Following the latest technological revolution, the old forms of political organization have become obsolete. The central fact of globalization is that the condition of citizens within a nation-state is now beyond the control of that country's

laws. Today more than ever, the slogan “no globalization without representation” remains relevant. This reflects a synthesis of “emancipatory catastrophism”: the idea that universal threats require universal rights, duties, and institutions.

A Multipolar World

In the 21st century, there are no longer two superpowers, but rather a group of medium-sized powers competing with one another. In a multipolar system, a balance of terror is impossible, and the risk of conventional or nuclear conflicts cannot be ruled out. The fundamental objective of the near future will be to find the conditions for a “peaceful coexistence” upon which the reform of the United Nations can be envisioned, finally bringing order to international relations and preventing ecological catastrophe. As shown by the modest progress achieved through climate COPs, as well as by the inability to renegotiate global inequalities and build a stable global peace, we remain far from this goal. Ours is a political drama that must be resolved before we end up subordinated to new spheres of influence: institutions are needed to guarantee democracy and the redistribution of resources.

A Copernican Revolution

It is no longer possible to imagine governing the contemporary world through individual nation-states or through the technocratic mechanisms of “global governance.” Instead, we must demand the repoliticization of expanding areas of globalization and modernity.

We must rethink the very role of the state by cosmopolitanizing it (that is, by encouraging regional integration in order to restore sovereignty to citizens) and revolutionizing our idea of democracy, reflecting on representative, deliberative, and participatory multilevel processes. Planetary emergencies require action on a global scale, the implementation of which cannot wait until democracy has prevailed everywhere. To pacify the world, we must accept the principle of coexistence among different cultures and socio-political systems. The interest of humanity's survival must prevail, ensuring – at least in the short to medium term – the coexistence of differences. In the long term (which can only be discussed if we still have a future), we may aspire to peaceful competition among models.

What Is to Be Done?

The way forward for a planet facing the danger of collapse must be to support the centripetal forces of planetary integration. Throughout history, empires have been the great organizations capable of holding together vast geographical areas and diverse cultures. Today, they represent one of the forms of supranational domination. Federalism is the true alternative: it is the political doctrine that guarantees freedom and supranationality without imperial domination. It is the model embodied by the ongoing experience of European unification.

Wherever the opportunity arises, it must be seized in order to bring into public debate the idea of regulating the relationship between humanity, technology, and nature, overcoming the dogma of national sovereignty. There is nothing utopian about this: every structure that appears natural to us is, in fact, historical. As Altiero Spinelli rightly stated:

“In the history of civilization, the common

good has successively been identified with the city-state, the empire, the social class, and the nation. We now stand at the threshold of an era in which the common good may finally be conceived as that of humanity as a whole.”

Europe and the World

Outside the EU, the planet is still governed in an imperial manner, and violence in foreign policy remains a useful tool for compensating for a lack of domestic consensus or for resolving international disputes. Europe is an exceptional area: the only form of geopolitical organization that continues to expand through consensus rather than conflict. Despite all its limitations, the European Union is the most powerful buffer against the forces of globalization that exists in the world. Yet all those who wish to attack it do so in the name of a divided memory: the idea that it is possible to return to the old nation-states.

We can continue to reproduce the reassuring myth in which we are innocent and bear little responsibility. Or we can accept the historical reality according to which Europeans exploited the world's resources for half a millennium, created something unprecedented in the second half of the twentieth century, and must now contribute to deciding how events will unfold in the twenty-first century. Potentially, Europeans are something greater than their myths, but the crisis they are facing prevents them from seeing the strength of an example placed at the service of all – an ideal capable of acting in the future to develop new hope among contemporary societies.

The Urgency of Building Europe

The completion of political union in the Old Continent would represent a model of peaceful coexistence capable of offering a form of governance for sustainable globalization, able

to overcome the limits of multiculturalism and abstract cosmopolitanism. It would embody an idea of open, multilayered identity, founded on the capacity to absorb conflict into a democratic dialectic characterized by dialogue.

This is not simply the sum of individual nationalisms, but rather an added value based on the humanization of relations among people and institutions. Interculturalism, democracy, pluralism, federalism, and Europe itself must therefore be understood as processes to be achieved by society, not as something fixed or immutable. They constitute both a civilizational framework and a specific objective within which individual contingent political struggles can be contextualized.

Only in this way will Europe cease to be “something” and become “someone” for Europeans and for the world. It is not a matter of “surrendering sovereignty,” but of reclaiming it.

Europeanism Is Not Enough

The utilitarian narrative of a “cash-machine Europe” has not been successful, and for years the field of identity politics has been occupied solely by national-populism, while the functionalist narrative has failed to convince. In order to keep the historical window of the European project open, it is essential to regain the support of citizens.

We are witnessing the consolidation of a dual political competition, both national and supranational, in which almost all political forces define themselves as “pro-European”; the term itself has now lost much of its meaning. Today’s Europe has therefore lost its sense of idealism because it is no longer “a promise,” but often a scapegoat for the failures of national politics.

It possesses a certain degree of power, yet it

does not function where it is most needed: in economic, foreign, and defense policy. In practice, without the instruments necessary to act, the Union risks slipping out of history one crisis at a time.

What Is Needed? A Budget and a Defense Policy

To move beyond the realm of utopia, Europe must immediately promote effective and impactful policies. In order to finance an adequate European budget, it will be necessary to complete the banking and capital markets union as soon as possible, identify new own resources by equipping the Union with autonomous fiscal capacity, and allow it to permanently issue its own debt securities with the aim of providing the markets with a European safe asset. Only in this way will it be possible to manage the ecological transition, preserve the welfare state, and safeguard inclusion policies.

At the same time, the factor of time is crucial in terms of integration: failure to achieve immediate progress in strategic autonomy or enlargement could, in the long run, trigger further disintegrative forces that would be difficult to control. A European foreign and defense policy is needed with the objective of building peace and reducing the various global causes of conflict.

This is the dual nature of what Europe must become: on the one hand, it must have the strength to assert its own voice within the chorus that shapes the dialogue of multipolar globalization; on the other hand, it must offer, through its example, an alternative possibility to the imperial scenario.

What Is Needed? Institutional Reform

However, the Union is not yet the Federation envisioned at Ventotene Manifesto. At present, it appears as an emerging post-national

normative order, an evolving transnational decision-making space. Ideas require institutions in order to achieve historical realization, but it is impossible to preserve institutions without solid policies.

Next Generation EU represented a historic step forward, but it was not enough. In order to prevent the ongoing process from coming to a halt, immediate action must be taken to consolidate a sovereignty belonging to Europeans themselves. What is needed is a true federal political union, achieved through institutional and constitutional reform, as has repeatedly been requested by the European Parliament.

Mario Albertini had already observed that nation-states gained strength through integration and, paradoxically, the illusion of still being actors capable of intervening effectively in national and international politics. The situation has worsened because, after more than ten years of uninterrupted crises, governments, through the Council, have trapped the Union in

the paralysis of mutual vetoes.

Conclusions

Many will think that this idea resembles a dream more than a feasible initiative. But the real utopia would be to believe that the world can change by itself, or that the problems of a borderless present can be solved by the return of borders, war, and xenophobic hatred. Today, "truth is simple, reality is complex": the self-absolving cowardice of those who merely wish to preserve the present is no longer acceptable. Political commitment is the ability to make the ideal real.

People are tired of technocratization, of being treated like creatures incapable of imagining a possible tomorrow that is no longer simply "yesterday." Many today say of Europe what Klemens von Metternich said of Italy in 1847: that it is "only a geographical expression." We must react; we cannot surrender the future, hope, and freedom. The world's resistance to imperialism begins with us.

The Lively Debate between Margaret Thatcher and Jacques Delors

Claudio Giulio Anta

The debate between Jacques Delors and Margaret Thatcher represented one of the most significant political and ideological confrontations in the history of European integration during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their opposing visions shaped discussions about the future of the European Economic Community (EEC), especially regarding sovereignty, economic integration, and the social dimension of Europe.

When Jacques Delors became President of the European Commission in 1985, the process of European integration was largely stagnant. One of the main obstacles had been the long dispute over Britain's contribution to the EEC budget, strongly defended by Thatcher. From the beginning of his presidency, Delors promoted a pragmatic and ambitious strategy inspired by Jean Monnet's method of setting clear objectives and deadlines. He famously proposed the elimination of internal European borders by 1992, arguing that one measure would naturally lead to another through a "virtuous mechanism" of integration.

Delors' early presidency became closely associated with the Single European Act (SEA), signed in 1986 by the twelve member states. The SEA aimed to complete the Single Market and strengthen the functioning of European institutions by extending majority voting. Delors considered the SEA an "accelerator" for European integration because it would allow institutions to act more effectively and create the conditions for further political and economic cooperation.

Initially, Thatcher strongly supported the SEA because she viewed it as a way to promote a free and competitive internal market. Her political philosophy was deeply influenced by economic liberalism and free-market theories. She believed in economic cooperation among European nations, but not in the creation of a politically unified Europe. As some observers noted, Thatcher supported "a Common Market" but rejected the idea of "a Common Country."

The ideological differences between Delors and Thatcher became increasingly visible during the second half of the 1980s. While Delors accepted the importance of the market economy, he also emphasized its limits and defended the need for social protection and political coordination. According to him, neoliberalism gave excessive power to the market and neglected collective social objectives. He openly associated Thatcher's policies with the neoliberal ideas of Friedrich von Hayek and criticized the spread of what he called a "single way of thinking" based exclusively on economic liberalism. In 1987 Delors presented the so-called "Delors I Package," a set of financial and institutional reforms designed to support the goals of the Single European Act. Delors argued that the Community had to combine the creation of a borderless market with greater economic and social cohesion. For him, the process of integration functioned according to the "spillover effect": progress in one sector would naturally encourage integration in others. The SEA, the financial reforms, and the future Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) were

all interconnected parts of the same strategy. Between 1988 and 1989 the project of the Economic and Monetary Union became more concrete thanks largely to Delors' leadership. During the Hanover European Council in 1988, he proposed the creation of a committee to study the path toward monetary union. The following year, the Delors Report outlined a three-stage plan leading to irrevocably fixed exchange rates and eventually to a single European currency. Delors considered the EMU not only an economic project, but also "the antechamber of political Europe."

At this stage, Thatcher's opposition intensified considerably. She increasingly viewed European legislation and institutional integration as threats to British sovereignty. Delors' speeches praising the growing role of European institutions convinced her that the EEC was moving toward a centralized "European superstate." Her concerns became most evident in the famous Bruges Speech delivered in September 1988 at the College of Europe.

In Bruges, Thatcher defended a Europe based on cooperation between sovereign states rather than on supranational centralization. She argued that political power should not be concentrated in Brussels and warned against excessive bureaucracy. According to Thatcher, Europe's strength came from independent nations working together voluntarily. She also emphasized the importance of maintaining strong transatlantic relations and preserving national identities.

The Bruges Speech had an enormous political impact. Many observers described it as a turning point in the development of British Euroscepticism. Within the Conservative Party, it became a symbolic reference for those opposed to deeper European integration. Even some members of Thatcher's government, such

as Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe, reacted negatively to her increasingly hostile position toward the European project.

Delors responded to Thatcher in another speech delivered at the College of Europe in Bruges in 1989. He defended the idea that shared sovereignty could strengthen Europe rather than weaken national states. According to Delors, the reforms introduced by the SEA had replaced institutional paralysis with greater dynamism and efficiency. He also reaffirmed that economic and monetary union represented the link between economic and political integration.

The conflict between the two leaders extended to social policy. Delors believed that the Single Market had to include a strong social dimension capable of protecting workers and preventing social inequality. In a speech to the Trade Union Congress in Bournemouth in 1988, he insisted that Europe could not become a source of social regression.

Thatcher strongly rejected this vision. During the Conservative Party Conference in Brighton in 1988, she attacked attempts to use European integration as a vehicle for socialist policies and centralized regulation. She defended the Treaty of Rome as a charter of economic freedom and warned that Britain had not fought against socialism at home only to see it reappear through European institutions. Nevertheless, Delors continued promoting social policies, leading to the approval of the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers in 1989, despite British opposition. The disagreement over European integration reached another critical moment in 1990 during discussions on the Economic and Monetary Union. After the Rome European Council, Thatcher declared in the House of Commons that Britain would never abandon the pound sterling, which she described as a

symbol of national sovereignty. She argued that monetary union represented a “back door to a federal Europe” and preferred intergovernmental cooperation instead of supranational integration. Her increasingly rigid position contributed to political tensions within the Conservative Party and eventually to her political downfall.

In retrospect, the Thatcher–Delors dispute highlighted three major issues. First, Thatcher supported the Single Market but underestimated Delors’ broader strategy of using economic integration to promote political and monetary union through the “spillover effect.” Second, while Thatcher feared the emergence of a federal superstate, Delors actually envisioned a “Federation of

nation-states” that would preserve national identities while allowing collective European action. Third, Thatcher’s criticism of the social dimension of European integration reflected a genuine ideological divide between neoliberal economic liberalism and Delors’ more socially oriented vision of Europe. The legacy of this debate remained highly influential in later decades. Thatcher’s speeches, especially the Bruges Speech, became central references for British Euroscepticism and were frequently invoked during the Brexit campaign of 2016. At the same time, Delors’ policies played a crucial role in shaping the modern European Union, particularly through the creation of the Single Market and the foundations of the Economic and Monetary Union.

Financing the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union: Federal Cohesion and Geopolitical Challenges

Umberto Nizza

The European Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) presents a structural aporia and the gap between declared ambitions and inadequate financial instruments reflects deliberate political choice privileging member state residual sovereignty over collective efficiency.¹ Liberal intergovernmentalism explains why financing mechanisms remain anchored to voluntary contribution and unanimous consent: EU Member States did not transfer resources to a common level reducing individual policy-shaping capacity, generating sub-optimal collective results.² The consequence of such inactions is the creation of an architecture oriented toward the lowest common denominator. The Union remains present in international politics as market and aid donor, yet gravely under-resourced when crisis management requires coordinated financial capacities.³

CFSP financing is articulated around three pillars: civilian missions budget, Athena mechanism for military operations, and European Defence Fund (EDF) for research and development. Common to these pillars is the absence of automaticity: resources mobilize through ad hoc negotiations reproducing the same political fractures mentioned above. The CFSP budget – 0.22% of the total – is structurally insufficient for commitments proportionate to Europe's

economic weight. Furthermore, annual budgeting precludes multi-annual strategic planning, while parliament's role is reduced to mere consultation.⁴ Athena also embodies framework contradictions, given that the "costs lie where they fall" principle generates perverse incentives⁵: deploying States bear costs while absent members contribute nothing yet benefit from the program.⁶ This institutionalizes free-riding as rational, with CSDP missions chronically under-resourced depending on few willing states. The European Defence Fund (€9.453 billion 2021–2027) and PESCO introduce supranational dimensions, yet the "juste retour"⁷ principle reproduces industrial fragmentation.⁸ Overall, the system proves quantitatively and qualitatively deficient, with absent automatic solidarity, slow activation mechanisms, inadequate democratic governance, structures unable to respond to crises except with delay and inferior resources.⁹

Current geopolitical circumstances impose a permanent crisis incompatible with existing mechanisms. Russia's Ukraine aggression demonstrated European security depends on autonomous deterrence capacity, not uncertain external guarantees. European response, despite short-term coherence, remains contingent, revealing absence of common defense financing structured for

crises of this magnitude.¹⁰ Union capacity as global actor requires stable, adequate, rapidly mobilizable resources independent of contingent political will. Simultaneity of crises – from Sahel to Indo-Pacific – exceeds single member capacities, demanding supranational response and perpetuating unanimous-consent financing represents deliberate strategic sub-optimality.¹¹ In this light, national defense investment fragmentation produced disaggregated European industrial base with costly overlaps and extra-European dependencies.¹² Correction requires commonly allocated resources through shared binding strategic planning creating globally competitive European defense industry.

A federalist approach to financing European foreign and defense policy might offer the Union an interpretive framework wherein financing choices express collective security governance grounded in principles ontologically incompatible with dominant intergovernmentalism.¹³ The spillover dynamic generates pressures for defense integration that current systems cannot satisfy, creating growing tensions between European aspirations and available institutional structures. For strategic planning, defense research financing, crisis management, and deterrence credibility, the European level offers unequivocal comparative advantages: economies of scale in weapons procurement, capability redundancy elimination, greater multilateral critical mass, and reduced dependence on individual external suppliers. Failure to realize these advantages would reflect domestic political resistances privileging symbolic visibility of national sovereignty over substantive effectiveness of collective security. Existing systems prove democratically opaque, with unanimity decisions in European Council lacking direct democratic mandates and Parliament

limited to consultation functions.¹⁴ A logic of differentiated integration – in which “Pioneer States” assume deeper commitments – would strengthen Union cohesion through vanguard dynamics progressively attracting laggards toward advanced integration levels,¹⁵ with potential benefits also on the current complex foreign policy matters.¹⁶

A federally inspired reform should redesign financial incentive architecture making solidarity institutional norm and free-riding costly exceptions. As a first axis, the Union should remove CFSP budget from annual negotiation, anchoring to binding multi-annual strategic objectives through automatic strategic reserves activated by pre-defined crisis urgency criteria. The boundary between internal and external security demands structural coordination between CFSP budget and internal security instruments.¹⁷ Athena mechanism reform constitutes immediate priority. Increasing commonly financed costs to 50% total operational expenditure for each mission, for example, with mandatory minimum contributions from all Member States regardless participation, might remove principal free-riding incentives and redistribute collective security burdens equitably.¹⁸ CSDP missions illustrate this dysfunction: net contributors bearing disproportionate shares discourages ambition, producing chronic mandate-means gaps. The most ambitious element would be to issue common European bonds for defense-foreign policy investment. NextGenerationEU demonstrated the political feasibility of common debt for collective emergencies. A European Security Defence Fund capitalized through common bonds – with Member State joint guarantees and parliamentary governance – might finance long-term defensive capabilities and rapid-response crisis instruments.¹⁹ Parliament’s role strengthening in common

defense financing is political condition for security integration sustainability. Current asymmetry – i.e., resources from taxpayers, decisions in intergovernmental settings – proves democratically untenable.²⁰

The CFSP financing is not a marginal technical question in European integration debate but a keystone determining gap between Europe as an enunciated political project and Europe as effectively operating power. This gap results from deliberately preserved resource fragmentation for national sovereignty conservation at enormous strategic cost: rendering Europe collectively less secure and influential than aggregate member resources would permit. The intergovernmental financing model has systematically sacrificed collective effectiveness for preservation of residual national autonomy in defense matters. European integration history demonstrates with consistency that qualitative leaps toward greater unity have been accomplished in response to crises that rendered maintenance of status quo untenable. The current geopolitical acceleration – characterized by simultaneous regional instability, technological disruption, and strategic uncertainty – possesses all characteristics of similar transformative

impulse toward financial integration in foreign and defense policy. In this perspective, the institutional capacity to respond will depend not on rhetorical commitment but on concrete financial mechanisms enabling rapid, coordinated action.

Proposed components – the CFSP multi-annual programming, Athena solidarity reform, common European defense bonds, parliamentary expenditure co-decision – encompass organic reform design inspired by important federalist principles: subsidiarity, solidarity, democratic legitimacy. The federalist perspective proposes not nation state disappearance but rational multi-level system organization where competences allocated by effectiveness and resources managed by collective responsibility. Federally organized European foreign-defense policy creates governance systems wherein common institutions dispose of the necessary financial resources translating strategic ambitions into operational capacities under democratic oversight representing European citizens. The current geopolitical situation makes this model both necessary and more-than-ever urgent for continental security's future.

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Beyond the Brussels Consensus: Common Debt as Pragmatic Federalism for Europe

Stefano Rossi & Ettore Dorrucci

For more than seventy years, Europe has repeatedly made use of supranational borrowing, issuing debt backed - directly or indirectly - by the guarantees of its Member States. From the first bonds issued by the European Coal and Steel Community in the 1950s, through decades of lending by the European Investment Bank, to the landmark experience of NextGenerationEU, and, more recently, instruments such as SAFE or the financing of Ukraine, common debt has been a recurring feature of European integration.

And yet, despite its long history, joint debt issuance has never become a permanent, structural component of the European policy framework. It has remained exceptional, temporary, and tightly constrained. This is not accidental. Rather, it reflects what may be described as a deeply embedded “Brussels consensus” on the limits of collective fiscal action in the European Union.

Understanding this consensus - and questioning its adequacy in today’s radically changed context - is essential for anyone committed to advancing the federalist cause in Europe.

The Logic and Limits of the Brussels Consensus

Across very different historical phases, legal bases, and political circumstances, European initiatives in joint debt issuance have displayed a remarkably consistent set of features.

First, common borrowing has always aimed at specific and ad-hoc objectives, such as response to shocks and crises or support to particular sectors. It has never been conceived as a standing fiscal instrument serving general macroeconomic or strategic purposes.

Second, each scheme has been explicitly temporary. Even when its scale has been unprecedented – as in the case of NGEU – joint borrowing has been framed as strictly time-bound, carefully avoiding any interpretation that might suggest the creation of a permanent fiscal capacity at the European level.

Third, European borrowing has followed a “flow” logic. Funds raised on the market have been used to finance new expenditure or lending, not to refinance or replace existing national public debts (stock approach). The idea of pooling or mutualising part of the stock of sovereign debt has remained a red line.

Fourth, liabilities have never been fully mutualised. Guarantees have always been proportional to national contributions, not joint and several. No Member State has formally committed to being responsible for the debts of others beyond a predefined quota.

Fifth, issuance has been managed by existing institutions such as the European Commission or, outside the EU framework, the European

Stability Mechanism. Europe still lacks a common Treasury endowed with autonomous taxing powers and a permanent central fiscal capacity.

Sixth, European joint borrowing has been designed to exclude any form of permanent fiscal transfers among Member States. The specter of a “transfer union” has loomed large in political debates and has consistently shaped the design of common instruments.

Together, these elements define a framework that has allowed European common debt to exist, but only within strict boundaries.

Political Union First? The Traditional Objection

Why has Europe never crossed these boundaries?

The prevailing answer has been overtly political. Moving toward permanent and fully mutualised common debt, it is argued, would require a transformation of the Union from a confederation of states into a genuine federation. As long as taxing powers and democratic accountability remain national, so the argument goes, a permanent European fiscal capacity would lack legitimacy.

This position has found supporters across much of the political spectrum. Anti-federalists have pointed to risks of moral hazard and loss of sovereignty. Federalists themselves have often argued that debt mutualisation cannot precede political union without undermining democratic control. The “horse” of political union, in this view, must come before the “cart” of common borrowing.

This reasoning is also reflected in EU primary law. Articles 310 and 312 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union prohibit the EU budget from running deficits as a general rule, while allowing borrowing only

on an exceptional basis and against earmarked revenues.

As a result, repeated attempts to cross the Rubicon of the Brussels consensus, such as proposals for a permanent macroeconomic stabilisation capacity or for a European safe asset replacing part of national debts, have failed to gather sufficient political support.

A Changed World, a Changed Rationale

Today, however, this reasoning is undergoing a fundamental reassessment.

Europe has entered a new historical phase. Major economies are increasingly competing to attract global savings and channel them into productive domestic investment. At the same time, a more conflictual and “Darwinian” geopolitical environment has made strategic autonomy – not only economic efficiency – a central policy objective.

In this context, the rationale for joint borrowing has shifted. The core issue is no longer crisis management, but the long-term financing of European Public Goods (EPGs): defence and security, clean energy and climate transition, digital infrastructure, advanced technologies, and industrial capacities essential for Europe’s sovereignty and resilience.

These are areas where market failures are pervasive, returns are uncertain or long-term, and national approaches are inefficient or suboptimal. No single Member State, acting alone, can credibly provide these goods at the scale required.

At the same time, political realities cannot be ignored. There is currently no willingness among Member States to establish a European federal state endowed with full fiscal sovereignty. Insisting on an all-or-nothing

federal leap risks condemning Europe to paralysis.

It is precisely here that a more pragmatic, federalist-inspired approach becomes necessary.

Coalitions of the Willing and Pragmatic Federalism

An alternative path has begun to gain traction: the idea that a coalition of willing Member States could initiate permanent and strategic common borrowing, without waiting for unanimous agreement or full political union.

Such an approach would deliberately depart from two key pillars of the Brussels consensus. Joint borrowing would no longer be strictly temporary, nor limited to ad hoc objectives. Instead, it would be used as a stable tool to finance long-term investment in EPGs.

Participation would be voluntary and open-ended. Any Member State could choose to join at a later stage, making this model inclusive. In this sense, the approach echoes the spirit of the Schuman Declaration of 1950, which explicitly envisaged integration progressing through concrete achievements and variable geometry.

Willing countries could pool resources to finance large-scale, innovative projects that exceed national capabilities. The economic case is strong. Fiscal multipliers are highest when spending targets goods produced in Europe, incorporates substantial research and development, is debt-financed, and is front-loaded.

Legal Pathways: Inside or Outside the Treaties?

Two main institutional routes are available. The first is enhanced cooperation under the EU Treaties, which allows at least nine

Member States to proceed together within the EU legal framework. This avenue has recently been used, for instance, to support lending to Ukraine.

The second is the creation of ad-hoc intergovernmental arrangements outside the EU framework, similar to Schengen or the European Stability Mechanism.

While enhanced cooperation has the advantage of institutional continuity and can more easily rely on the existing market infrastructure, its legal and political constraints are significant. In practice, it makes a genuine break with the Brussels consensus difficult, if not impossible.

Intergovernmental arrangements, by contrast, offer greater flexibility. They allow willing states to move faster, define tailored governance structures, and gradually deepen commitments. For this reason, they appear better suited to initiating a “next generation” of joint borrowing in Europe.

Crucially, common debt issuance should not be viewed in isolation. It must be part of a broader strategy that includes coordinated R&D, joint procurement, and coherent fiscal and industrial policies, designed to crowd in private investment rather than substitute for it.

From Flows to Stocks: Towards a European Safe Asset?

Even so, financing EPGs on a flow basis would not be enough to unlock the full potential of common debt. Europe still lacks a genuine safe asset comparable to U.S. Treasuries - an asset that could underpin capital market integration, strengthen the international role of the euro, and enhance Europe’s strategic autonomy.

Over time, a coalition of the willing could move beyond a flow approach, and also replace

part of their national sovereign bonds with a common European asset. This would imply a stock approach and stronger forms of risk mutualisation.

Recent convergence in sovereign yields among euro area issuers - which has proved surprisingly resilient to the latest shocks - sets more favourable market conditions than those prevailing in the fifteen years after the Great Financial Crisis. Some observers interpret this phenomenon as the gradual emergence of a de facto European benchmark - not a legal mutualisation of debt, but a collectively priced confidence premium reflecting an increased willingness of investors to treat euro-denominated sovereign debt as a single asset class, supported by the ECB's commitment to prevent disorderly market fragmentation.

Discipline, mutual self-interest and solidarity would have to advance together.

At the same time, a pragmatic roadmap towards a European safe asset - which starts from EPG financing and from there gradually builds trust across participating countries - may prove more realistic than financial engineering solutions that are politically too front-loaded. Europe cannot ask its Member States to cross some of their hardest red lines right from the start. Historically, European integration has never proceeded that way.

Economic and Monetary Union itself did not begin with Stage 3.

Federalism as Process, Not Blueprint

For European federalists, the key lesson is clear. Fiscal integration cannot be reduced to a binary choice between the status quo and a fully-fledged federal state. Europe has always advanced through incremental, imperfect solutions driven by concrete necessity.

Common debt, if initially designed around the financing of strategic investment in EPGs and anchored in credible commitments, can become a powerful engine of integration, even in the absence of complete political union. It can create facts on the ground, build trust, and gradually reshape expectations among governments, citizens, and markets alike.

The tensions between fiscal discipline, solidarity, and political feasibility are not contradictions to be resolved once and for all. They are structural features of the European project. Managing them pragmatically is the true task of federalism today.

In this sense, moving beyond the Brussels consensus is not about abandoning principles. It is about adapting them to a world in which Europe's unity, sovereignty, and capacity to act are at stake.

The contents of this article are derived from E. Dorrucci, S. Rossi, *"Towards a next generation of joint borrowing in Europe"*, Perspectives on federalism, February 2026.

A Civic Shield for European Democracy

Michele Fiorillo

Democracy is under threat across Europe: disinformation, manipulation and external interference are undermining the quality of public debate; national-populist forces are gaining ground and multiplying in every country like the heads of a hydra; and there is widespread mistrust of institutions, as well as voter apathy and the fragmentation of the political class and civil society – whilst the European public sphere, still in the early stages of its development, finds itself overwhelmed by the rapid pace of global digital transformation and artificial intelligence. Against this backdrop of existential vulnerability, the European Commission presented, in a non-binding communication in November 2025 – alongside the *EU Strategy for Civil Society* – the launch of the *European Democracy Shield*: a strategic framework conceived as urgent collective effort to “protect democracy and build the democratic resilience of citizens, societies and institutions”.

The Shield is structured around three pillars: safeguarding the integrity of the information space; strengthening democratic institutions, free elections and independent media; and promoting social resilience and citizen engagement. This last pillar is particularly relevant to the construction of the European public sphere: the Commission appears to wish to strengthen civic engagement to counter the fragmentation of public debate caused by digital ecosystems.

The communication assigns a central role to deliberative tools: “the European Citizens’ Panels and the Citizens’ Engagement Platform, have become important assets to inform and support policymaking, build

democratic resilience and foster European citizenship and their use at EU level and in the Member States will be encouraged”.¹ The Commission announces its intention to make the participatory platform ‘interoperable’ – extending it to national, regional and local administrations– and to build a network of national authorities on civic participation, with technical support from the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy, part of its Joint Research Center.

A European Citizens’ Panel on democratic resilience will engage European citizens in reflecting on policies to protect against threats to democracy.² The ‘alumni’ of the European Citizens’ Panels – renamed here as Citizens’ Engagement Ambassadors –will be involved in promoting civic participation, thereby linking local initiatives with the European dimension– including by leveraging the Europe Direct local centres and the Erasmus+ programme, which will step up support for democratic literacy projects. Finally, a new European Centre for Democratic Resilience will be launched, dedicated to robust operational cooperation against hybrid threats, in particular foreign manipulation and interference in information.

The Centre would bring together the expertise of Member States and candidate countries, as well as EU institutions and agencies, including the European External Action Service – and would be developed gradually on the basis of voluntary participation and contributions from Member States, alongside a platform for dialogue with civil society, academia and the media, and a new European network of fact-checkers.

The structural limitations of the Shield become strikingly apparent here: on the one hand, the predominantly non-binding and piecemeal nature of the proposed measures, their dependence on the competences of the Member States, and the absence of any real new powers for the European institutions; on the other, the risk of an excessively sectoral, security-focused and technocratic approach, which reduces democracy to a mere information issue, without addressing the key questions of European democratic sovereignty – and the Union’s strategic and political autonomy. Furthermore, citizen involvement appears to remain largely consultative and disconnected from decision-making processes, risking a democratic engagement gap between deliberation and actual political decision-making – where the weight of the Council’s intergovernmentalism would continue to limit the full development of European democracy.

From a strategic perspective, the Shield should be coordinated with the aim of a common European defense, subject to supranational mechanisms of robust democratic control, to be made effective within a framework of the Union’s constitutionalization. The intertwining of measures for democratic resilience and defense integration could thus help pave the way for a new *de facto* constituent moment in Europe. If transformed into politically effective instruments – not least under pressure from pro-European and federalist movements and organized European civil society³ – the deliberative and participatory mechanisms, cultural and educational programmes⁴ and civic networks provided for by the European Democracy Shield could decisively contribute to establish the transnational popular constituent power necessary for the co-creation of a federal Union.

1. This is reflected in the *Strategy for Civil Society*, where it is written: “The Commission plans to also increase its collaboration with civil society through different platforms and initiatives. It will involve young people and organizations in various youth forums, encourage civil society participation in debates on the Citizens’ Engagement Platform, and connect civil society with citizens’ input from the European Citizens’ Panels to help shape EU policies.”

2. The European Citizens’ Panel will take place from September to November 2026 and will bring together 150 citizens from the 27 Member States, selected by lottery to reflect the diversity of European society. They will meet – in Brussels and online – to make recommendations to the European Commission, addressing this fundamental question: ‘How can we strengthen democracy today?’

3. For example: networks of European civil society organizations – as “Citizens Take Over Europe” or “Civil Society Europe” – could seek to leverage on the European Citizens’ Panel (ECP) on democratic resilience to build momentum for the necessary reform of European electoral law, including uniform electoral rules across the various Member States and the introduction of transnational lists. On the other hand, they could launch, in the wake of the ECP, a campaign to transform the European Citizens’ Panels into a permanent, fully-fledged and institutionalized European Citizens’ Assembly, as part of the EU legislative process, with recommendations having binding effect on the other EU institutions. This could also be linked to a possible European Citizens’ Initiative on democracy, which could open a broad debate on the democratization of the European Union as a means of strengthening and ensuring the resilience of the European project.

4. This aspect will be particularly developed together with the new program suggestively named *AgoraEU*, which aims – as stated in the *Strategy for Civil Society* – to “enhance the protection and promotion of fundamental rights, encourage democratic participation and resilience, promote cultural diversity and artistic freedom, and foster a free and diverse information landscape”.

Make Hungary Boring again

Eszter Nagy

After our failed revolutions, the 15th of March in 1848, the 23rd of October in 1956, the day, April 12th, 2026, will enter Hungarian history as an electoral revolution. It happened despite the state capture, the Media hegemony of the government party, and Hungary not being considered a democracy since 2019 by Freedom House. Many Hungarians didn't even believe it beforehand that the Orbán-regime could be defeated at a parliamentary election. Luckily, they proved to be wrong.

Viktor Orbán installed in power in 2010 had one wish, a promise to himself that he made after his defeat in 2002, that if he got elected again, he would stay in power for good. He wanted to build a system in which he could never be defeated again. Immediately after his major victory in 2010 earning him a constitutional majority in Parliament, he started to build up the Hungarian "Death star", a new political system shaped for cementing his power and securing his future victories. He turned the Parliament into a "law factory" starting with a brand-new constitution written by Fidesz politicians that was adopted without any consultation with other parties, civil organizations or citizens. The same happened with the new Media law and the Electoral law, as well. There were mass protests and demonstrations against these laws, but the political leadership didn't seem to bother. They instead chose the back entrance of the Opera house to escape the angry crowds, where the official ceremony of the new Constitution took place.

This strategy had worked to perfection. In combination with the regular fake news and

hate spreading billboard campaigns, it secured the constitutional majority throughout three more (!) general elections; in 2014, in 2018, and in 2022. So, what happened in these past years? How could this electoral revolution happen in an informational autocracy type of regime?

In the 2010s, there was economic prosperity on one hand getting out of the financial crisis, and on the other hand the EU funds coming to Hungary had already reached their peak amount, so Orbán could take the political advantage of the positive circumstances. The EU was also a bit too patient with Hungary, and it took too long to react to the democratic backsliding in Hungary and finally introduce the rule of law mechanism. The freezing of the funds, the end of the ERASMUS and HORIZON programs for most Hungarian universities – the ones turned into public trust foundations under political control – were belated, but strong hits for the Orbán regime. State corruption, a type of crony capitalism with a system of oligarchs, doesn't favor a merit-based market economy. In the long run, it is not even sustainable. That's why Hungary has slipped to the bottom of the ranks in almost every field within the EU. The population also started to feel the consequences; high inflation, low wages, failing public services in health care and education, etc.

The political hit came unexpectedly, in February 2024 with the "pardon scandal". A lawyer accidentally discovered that a pedophile aide was pardoned by the president the previous year on the occasion of the Pope's visit to

Hungary. It caused such an outrage, that within a week, Katalin Novák, the president of the Republic had to resign, as well as Judit Varga, the former justice minister who countersigned this decision. This was the turning point, where Fidesz lost control of the narrative; Orbán whose leading slogan was “Family friendly Hungary” and child protection – despite saving himself with these two resignations – got the strongest ever political blow, and his system started cracking. This moment brought the appearance of Péter Magyar, the former husband of Judit Varga. He walked into the studio of an independent News outlet and gave his first interview viewed by millions within a couple of days. A charismatic guy from Fidesz circles criticizing the party was unheard of before. People were eager to find a politician whom they could finally believe in after the failures and incompetence of the former opposition figures. Péter Magyar soon found an existing small party, the TISZA party, “Tisztelet és Szabadság” (Respect and Freedom) and the rest is history.

During the last days before the elections there was already a revolutionary feeling in the streets of Budapest, a very heated atmosphere on one hand due to the government billboard campaign, on the other hand people angry about them, “correcting” the billboards expressing opposition to the government propaganda. Documentaries came out from whistleblowers on the social Media sites; the story of police captain Bence Szabo, of the military officer Szilveszter Pálinkás, the documentary *The Price of the Vote*, all showed how rotten the Orbán-regime was. Parallel to this, Péter Magyar did his final rally over the country visiting 6-7 places daily in the last weeks, where cheering crowds gathered every time even in former Fidesz strongholds to listen to him, letting themselves carried away by the system-changing emotion and the ray of

hope that finally Hungarians can get rid of this suppressing illiberal regime.

Most of us could hardly believe that it really happened. We were expecting some dirty trick from Orbán until the last moment, there was anxiety whether Orbán would give over the power peacefully if defeated. That’s why relief and euphoria were so big on election day. On Sunday evening the crowd erupted in ovation and clapping when we saw on the screen that Orbán congratulated Péter Magyar, the cheering became even louder, when they announced the 2/3 majority of the Tisza party. It was a euphoric moment. People were hugging each other, smiling, laughing, dancing in the streets of Budapest and all over the country. It was a moment of realization that democracy works indeed, that our vote really counts, no matter how rigged the system under the Orbán-regime got. It was hard to believe after the 16 years of Orbán-rule that it is really over. And it took a while to digest this pivotal moment that a new era has finally begun in Hungary.

On Monday afternoon, the day after the elections, watching the first international Press Conference of Péter Magyar was a new experience; a press conference where independent news outlets could participate, ask questions and they got real answers. We have already forgotten this type of normalcy; we have to get used to it again.

In the meantime, Fidesz politicians were ghosting away, some lower rank people started to blame Viktor Orbán for the defeat, some left public life immediately, but all puzzled. Orbán himself didn’t resign, he said he wanted to continue to rebuild his party now that the pressure of governing is not pushing them and then disappeared for a few days. He ghosted the European allies, as well, as neither him nor Szíjjártó, the outgoing foreign minister,

participated at the informal European Council meeting in Cyprus. Probably it was also better this way for everyone. Later on, he even ghosted his own party members, as he announced that he wouldn't even sit in Parliament.

On April 18th, the final results were announced; 141 seats for the Tisza party and altogether 52 for Fidesz, 6 for the Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) extreme right party. Fidesz won only 10 out of 106 individual election districts. Tisza has 70% of the seats in Parliament, a landslide victory.

What do we inherit from the Orbán-regime? The deficit until April reached over 80% of the yearly forecast. Orbán-close oligarchs owe the most prestigious hotels, historical buildings in Budapest, a big proportion of land all over the country, castles, hotel chains, the biggest construction companies and others, including the biggest bank. Orbán built up a luxurious estate for himself in Hatvanpuszta, his son-in-law has become one of the richest persons in Hungary. Democratic checks and balances are emptied; Fidesz-close functionaries are sitting on the top of would-be autonomous institutions including the national prosecutor

and the members of the Constitutional Council. The state is indebted, polluting battery factories are mushrooming in the country, there is high dependence on Russian fossil energy. Society is divided to the extent that families and couples have been broken because of differences in political convictions.

Some people fear that there is no "leftist" party now in the Parliament, but in the electoral system designed by Fidesz, Tisza's main task was to break down the regime, the electoral law was not designed to allow democratic diversity and pluralism. Now, we are at the beginning of a long and bumpy road; to dismantle the Fidesz crony structure, to hold the guilty accountable, to deliver justice, and to restore liberal democracy, to build up a more resilient system of checks and balances not to allow an authoritarian turn again. But Péter Magyar's Tisza party received the highest ever democratic authorization from the people to do it.

Hungarians understood the stakes of this election, and made an unequivocal decision on April 12th, 2026: Hungary's place is in the European Union.

Hungarian Election Puts Fico in Tight Spot

Fabio Maina & Alexander Duleba

At the beginning of May 2026, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico made unexpected remarks about peace in Ukraine. His comments were noteworthy for a couple of reasons. First, Fico's government has been ambiguous at best regarding its support for Ukraine and in maintaining its position as a reliable EU and NATO partner. Second, the timing of this "rhetorical switch" is curious: just three weeks earlier, Hungarian elections had marked the end of Viktor Orbán's sixteen years' rule.

Slovakia's foreign policy under Fico: unrewarding ambivalence.

Following the 2023 elections, Robert Fico's party, Smer, formed a government with the center-left Hlas, which holds more moderate views than Smer, and the Slovak National Party (SNS), a small, hard-right party led by Andrej Danko. The government manifesto presented a vision for a "sovereign foreign policy" directed at "all four corners" of the world. In practice, Slovakia has politically aligned more closely with Moscow but also Beijing, as demonstrated by multiple visits to both capitals. Fico has praised the illiberal governance of China and Vietnam, as, unlike defective democracies, these countries "make plans and actually carry them out"¹. Fico has often accused partners of being "warmongers", has depicted the EU as a doomed project, has denied the existence of war in Kyiv, visited Moscow during the yearly 9th May victory parades, and threatened multiple times to block EU sanctions against Russia.

This "sovereign foreign policy" risks undermining Slovakia's relations with its

main allies. Slovakia's geopolitical framework is the EU and NATO architecture, a point acknowledged even within the government manifesto itself. EU partners remain Slovakia's main trading partners. NATO guarantees Slovak security. Moreover this depreciation of the "Western" corner is not compensated for by big political and economic gains from the increased emphasis on the "Eastern" one. Despite numerous symbolic gestures, the rapprochement with Russia and China has generated little, if any, positive economic impact. The principal aim of this foreign policy therefore appears to be the consolidation of domestic support, achieved by appealing to a West-skeptic demographic through inflammatory rhetoric and symbolic actions.

Enter Magyar: What is the Future for Fico after Orbán's Defeat?

It is no secret that Viktor Orbán has served as an inspiration for Fico in both his domestic and foreign policy. Although Fico's "Eastern" foreign policy is rooted in Vladimir Mečiar's idea of making Slovakia "a bridge between East and West" in the 1990s, a far more recent source of inspiration is Orbán's "Eastern Opening" foreign policy launched in the 2010s. However, the April 12th election ended with Orbán's clear defeat.

In foreign policy, Fico has now lost his "partner in crime" when it comes to challenging the EU (and NATO). Both Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and Bulgaria's new Prime Minister Rumen Radev appear unwilling to undermine EU and NATO unity, despite some

“pro-Russian” and “Eurosceptic” rhetorical posturing. If Fico chose to “take Orbán’s baton,” he would be alone, and potentially face further diplomatic isolation. Orbán’s defeat also has domestic implications. It showed that the “Orbán-like” type of populist conservatism that Fico also seems to espouse is not at all unbeatable. Furthermore, neither Russian influence nor support from the MAGA movement proved sufficient to secure Orbán win: on the contrary, the Hungarian government’s quasi-subordination to Russia turned out to be political poison for Fidesz. The MAGA endorsement, culminating in JD Vance’s visit to Budapest, had much the same effect, with public approval for Orbán visibly declining further after the event.

In this context, Fico seems to have decided to (partially) recalibrate his stance towards the EU and Ukraine. Thus, he stated that any peace deal regarding Ukraine must have Kyiv’s consent, and held talks with Zelensky in Yerevan. To be fair, Fico said that he and Zelensky “still do not like each other”, although they “want good relations”. However, the slight change in tone is being noticed. SNS felt it necessary to reiterate its staunch opposition to Ukraine’s EU membership, demanding guarantees that the Prime Minister will never vote in favor of it and threatening the stability of the coalition². In the past, Danko called for Slovakia’s withdrawal from the EU, which he called a “prison of nations”³.

Together with SNS, Republika – which remains outside both the government coalition and Parliament – represents the other major far-right, Eurosceptic, and NATO-sceptic force in Slovak politics. The party advocates transforming the EU into a purely economic and fully intergovernmental institution and has pledged to withdraw Slovakia from the Union should its proposed “reforms” fail. These parties may attract Smer voters who

have grown frustrated with Robert Fico for “talking the talk” without “walking the walk”. However, SNS is currently polling at around 3 percent, while Republika fluctuates between 10 and 13 percent⁴. Over the past three years in government, both Smer and Hlas have experienced a decline in public support, while the leading party in the polls is now Progressive Slovakia. In addition, several smaller centrist and centre-right parties are polling at approximately 7 percent. Were elections to be held today, Fico would likely lose. His position is further complicated by his decision to criminalize criticism of the Beneš Decrees after Progressive Slovakia stated its commitment to resolving the issue⁵. These decrees were issued during the Second World War and remained in effect after its end. They targeted Hungarians living in Slovakia at the time and still facilitated the seizure of their property by the government. This move by Fico led Slovak Hungarians to move closer to the opposition. It is also impacting relations between Budapest and Bratislava: while Orbán has been mostly silent on the issue, Magyar has conditioned future Hungarian-Slovak cooperation on addressing the Beneš Decrees⁶.

Orbán’s electoral defeat has, in essence, placed the Slovak government between a rock and a hard place. For now, Fico continues to do what he has done best throughout these three years in office: play both sides, albeit in a considerably less confrontational manner. He states that no peace can be made without Ukraine’s consent and meets Zelensky during the EPC summit in Yerevan, while taking care to reiterate that he still does not like him. He attended the annual “Victory Day” parade in Moscow, but he downplayed the extent of his participation. However, as domestic pressures mount and Magyar’s victory has changed the regional context, this ambivalence has become less of an asset and more of a liability.

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- ⁵ Mesežnikov G. "Beneš Decrees: Persistent Ghosts in Bratislava and Budapest." *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Prague*, February 25th, 2026. <https://cz.boell.org/en/2026/02/25/benes-decrees-persistent-ghosts-bratislava-and-budapest>.
- ⁶ Reuters, "Minority rights resurface in Slovak-Hungarian relations after Magyar's win." April 21st, 2026. <https://www.reuters.com/world/minority-rights-resurface-slovak-hungarian-relations-after-magyars-win-2026-04-21/>.

Bulgaria after the 2026 Election: Between a “New Orbán” and More of the Same

Lubomira Popova

On 19th April 2026, Bulgaria held a parliamentary election that seemed to put an end to a long-lasting political crisis. The Progressive Bulgaria Movement, led by former president Rumen Radev, won an absolute majority. The result was also symbolically significant: for the first time in exactly 29 years – since 19th April 1997, when Bulgarian voters entrusted Ivan Kostov's United Democratic Forces with a parliamentary majority – a single electoral formation was able to govern without coalition partners.

Radev's electoral victory brought Bulgaria an unusual degree of international attention. For a brief moment, the country gained visibility in the European media space. Yet what was striking was not only the attention itself, but also the conflicting signals the result seemed to send. International coverage described the election through very different and sometimes contradictory frames: as a possible source of “stability”, but also as bringing to power a left-leaning populist, an Eurosceptic, a Kremlin-friendly politician, even a “new Orbán.” Strikingly, some interpretations placed Radev simultaneously in the company of Viktor Orbán and Péter Magyar – two figures who represent very different political meanings in today's Europe.

This ambiguity was not accidental. It reflected the peculiar character of Radev's electoral campaign, which seemed designed to appeal to almost everyone at once. His programme document was based on broad promises, while offering hardly any clearly structured priorities, let alone instruments for achieving them. Voters were addressed through broad appeals targeted at very different segments of Bulgarian society:

from left to right, from Euro-Atlantic voters to pro-Russian constituencies, from nationalists and Eurosceptics to citizens who still broadly support Bulgaria's place in the EU. This inevitably creates uncertainty about the political meaning of Radev's mandate. Did he win because of pro-European expectations, Eurosceptic dissatisfaction, anti-corruption anger, or simply the desire for order after years of instability? And which of these constituencies will he try hardest to satisfy once in office? If one looks strictly at his programme, the EU occupies a surprisingly marginal place. If one looks instead at his broader pre-election and presidential rhetoric, the picture looks rather different.

The major question troubling Bulgaria's EU partners is what Radev's victory means for the country's role in the Union. Is Bulgaria about to become a new veto player on the EU scene, replacing Hungary as the most difficult member state? Yet these concerns also reveal something about the EU itself: its unresolved institutional weaknesses, and its limited capacity to respond to member states that remain formally aligned with the Union while producing democratic uncertainty at home.

Before assessing the country's future EU trajectory, we need to understand how Bulgaria has exercised its role as a member state until now. Bulgaria consistently followed a strategy of superficial pro-Europeanism abroad, through which the political elite effectively secured a high degree of EU non-interference in domestic politics. For a long time, this strategy proved successful. EU institutions and member states were willing to overlook

problematic domestic practices in exchange for Bulgaria's open support for the Union and its demonstrative pro-EU positioning.

The ambiguity of Radev's campaign makes it useful to distinguish between four possible ways in which Bulgaria may position itself within the EU.

Destructive alignment

The first scenario is continuity. Bulgaria may continue the familiar strategy of superficial pro-Europeanism: expressing clear pro-EU positions abroad, while using this external alignment to conceal domestic institutional deficiencies. In this case, Bulgaria would remain formally loyal and rhetorically cooperative, but without contributing substantively to a stronger or more democratic Union. This would be a continuation of the old pattern: European loyalty as a shield against scrutiny at home.

Constructive alignment

A second, more optimistic scenario would be a genuinely constructive pro-European position. Bulgaria could begin to project a clear and consistent voice within the EU, one that defines Bulgarian interests in relation to the broader EU ones. This would mean actively seeking coalitions, negotiating and making compromises across different lines of interest. At least rhetorically, this seems to correspond to the official claim of Radev's movement for a more active, respected and effective Bulgaria within the EU.

Constructive disagreement

A third possibility is a shift toward constructive disagreement. Bulgaria could become more assertive in defining and pursuing its national interests, both domestically and at the EU level. This would involve setting clearer priorities, engaging in stronger bargaining, and showing a willingness to challenge its partners. Yet such

disagreement would remain constructive if it took place within the framework of common EU values, legal commitments and shared strategic priorities. This scenario also fits important elements of Radev's campaign, especially its emphasis on sovereignty, dignity and a more active defence of national interests.

Destructive disagreement

The fourth scenario is the most worrying. Bulgaria could turn into a destructive veto player in EU decision-making, obstructing common positions along key ideological and geopolitical lines. This concern is linked to some of Radev's emblematic statements during his presidential mandate and electoral campaigns, especially those that raised doubts about Bulgaria's position on Ukraine and his calls for a referendum on the timing of the country's euro adoption. In this scenario, national interest would no longer be articulated as part of a European debate, but used as justification for blocking common EU action.

Only time will tell which of these paths the new Bulgarian government will choose in its EU policy. The initial signals, however, do not point towards a radical shift in Bulgaria's role within the EU. Moreover, the first days after the election suggest that the EU will not be a central topic in Bulgarian political life. On the contrary, the debate seems likely to be absorbed by domestic issues.

For Bulgaria's EU partners, this may look like a reason for relief, at least for now. Yet the deeper question remains: what does this mean for the functioning of the EU itself? Can the EU celebrate another narrow escape – another case in which a potentially difficult member state remains formally aligned with the Union – while ignoring the deeper democratic weaknesses behind that alignment? Or is it time for the EU to seriously discuss the legitimacy, accountability and consequences of the forms of stability it tolerates, both inside and outside the Union?

Cyprus Parliamentary Elections 2026

Neophytos Aristodemou

The parliamentary elections held in Cyprus on 24th May 2026 produced one of the most consequential political shifts the country has experienced in more than a decade¹. Although Cyprus operates under a presidential system, parliamentary elections remain a crucial barometer of political sentiment, institutional trust, and the evolving relationship between society and the state. This year's vote confirmed a pattern that has been unfolding across Europe: fragmentation of the traditional party system, the rise of anti-establishment forces, and the emergence of new political actors who challenge long-standing political norms. The results themselves were striking. DISY once again emerged as the largest party, securing 27.1 percent and 17 seats, reaffirming its position as the dominant force of the centre-right. AKEL followed closely with 23.9 percent and 15 seats, maintaining its parliamentary strength and confirming its role as the principal opposition. Yet the most dramatic development was the surge of ELAM, the far-right formation that doubled its representation and became the third largest party with 10.9 percent and eight seats. This breakthrough places Cyprus firmly within the broader European trend of rising nationalist and anti-migration parties, whose narratives resonate with segments of the electorate frustrated by economic pressures, migration flows, and perceived institutional distance. The elections also marked the arrival of two new political forces in the House of Representatives. ALMA, a reformist anti-corruption platform, entered parliament with 5.8 percent and four seats, capitalising on public demand for transparency and institutional renewal. Direct Democracy Cyprus, led by MEP Fidias Panayiotou, secured 5.4 percent

and four seats, bringing into the legislature a form of algorithm-driven populism that blends anti-establishment rhetoric with ambiguous ideological positioning. The presence of these two new parties underscores a growing appetite for alternatives to the traditional political establishment, particularly among younger voters who feel disconnected from conventional party structures.

Equally significant were the losses. Several long-standing parties failed to cross the 3.6 percent threshold, together representing nearly 17 percent of the total vote. EDEK, a historic party founded in 1969, fell to 3.3 percent and exited parliament for the first time in its history, prompting the resignation of its leader on election night. The Ecologists also failed to secure representation, dropping to 2 percent, while DIPA, Volt Cyprus, and the Hunters' Movement remained below the threshold. The disappearance of these parties from parliament marks a profound reconfiguration of the political landscape, signalling the end of an era in which smaller centrist or issue-based parties played a stabilising role in Cypriot politics. Turnout reached 66.9 percent, a figure consistent with the previous parliamentary elections in 2021. This stability suggests that voter engagement remains relatively high despite political volatility, but the distribution of votes reveals a deeper transformation. The electorate is increasingly willing to abandon traditional loyalties, experiment with new political formations, and express dissatisfaction through protest votes or support for outsider candidates.

The implications of these results extend beyond the composition of the new parliament.

President Nikos Christodoulides now faces a more complex political environment. Without the support of DISY, he may struggle to secure parliamentary majorities for key reforms, while cooperation with ELAM would be politically contentious and potentially damaging to Cyprus's international standing. The new parliament will shape debates on migration, energy strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean, economic reforms, and the future of the Cyprus settlement process. Although coalition building is not required for government formation, issue-by-issue alliances will become essential for legislative progress, making the political landscape more unpredictable. The Cypriot elections also mirror broader European dynamics. The rise of ELAM reflects the continent-wide surge of far-right parties that capitalise on anxieties about migration, identity, and economic insecurity. The erosion of traditional party systems, exemplified by the historic exit of EDEK and the decline of smaller centrist parties, echoes developments seen in countries such as France, Italy, and Germany. Meanwhile, the strengthening of anti-corruption and outsider movements aligns with a wider European trend in which voters seek new political vehicles to express frustration with institutional inertia and perceived democratic deficits. Despite these shifts, pro-European forces continue to dominate numerically in Cyprus. DISY, AKEL, DIKO, and ALMA collectively hold a majority of seats, ensuring that Cyprus remains aligned with EU institutions and that EU-related legislation will generally pass. The EU remains central to Cyprus's foreign and security policy, particularly in areas such as sanctions, energy, and migration. Yet challenges persist. ELAM's rise strengthens nationalist and anti-Brussels narratives, while Direct Democracy Cyprus introduces an unpredictable element into parliamentary debates, given its fluid ideological profile and reliance on digital mobilisation. Fragmentation may complicate

Cyprus's ability to present a coherent EU policy line, especially on sensitive issues such as migration and the Cyprus problem. This brings the discussion to one of the most sensitive institutional debates within the EU: the future of unanimity and the potential shift toward qualified majority voting in foreign policy. For Cyprus, this debate is not merely procedural; it is existential.

The veto is widely perceived in Nicosia as a strategic shield, a tool that allows a small state under military occupation to protect its core interests in a geopolitical environment dominated by larger powers. Cyprus uses the veto sparingly, but values it deeply. It is the only EU member state facing a direct security threat from a non-EU regional power, and it relies on the EU to balance asymmetries in diplomacy and negotiations. For Cyprus, the veto is not obstructionism but leverage – a means of ensuring that EU foreign policy does not bypass national priorities. Yet this position creates a federalist dilemma. A more integrated EU with fewer vetoes would, in theory, strengthen Europe's geopolitical weight and enhance its capacity to act decisively. But for Cyprus, federalism without safeguards risks losing its only hard-power tool in EU decision-making, being outvoted on issues directly affecting its sovereignty, and weakening its ability to link EU-Turkey relations to the Cyprus problem. Cyprus often supports “more Europe,” but fears “less unanimity,” a paradox that reflects the tension between national security concerns and the broader European project.

Any future treaty revision that touches unanimity will force Cyprus to defend three core principles: the preservation of member-state equality, the establishment of stronger EU security guarantees before institutional change, and the maintenance of the Cyprus problem as a European issue. Treaty reform cannot create a situation in which EU-Turkey relations evolve

independently of Cyprus's core interests. These red lines will shape Cyprus's position in upcoming debates on the future of Europe, particularly as discussions on institutional reform intensify. The 2026 parliamentary elections thus mark a turning point for Cyprus. They reveal a society in transition, navigating between continuity and change, stability and volatility, European integration and national

sovereignty. The new political landscape is more fragmented, more unpredictable, and more reflective of broader European currents. Yet it also offers opportunities for renewal, reform, and a more open political dialogue. How Cyprus manages this new environment – and how it positions itself within the evolving European architecture – will shape its political trajectory for years to come.

1. For more details look at the analysis on the history of Parliamentary elections in Cyprus between 1960 and 2021 prepared by Dedomenon at: <https://www.dedomenon.eu/parliamentary/elections/cy>

XXIX UEF Congress in Barcelona - Confirmation of the Unity Of European Federalists and Their Strong Commitment Towards the Necessary Institutional Changes

Daphne Gogou

The context

The Union of European Federalists (UEF) held with great success in March 2026 in Barcelona its XXIX European Congress. The Congress reaffirmed the unity of all European Federalists and their determination to work closely for deepening the European integration towards a true Federation. It was also a great opportunity for an in-person reunion of politicians, policymakers and federalist activists from different national sections to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the organization's founding and have intensive political debates concerning the future of the European Union and issues of global governance amid ongoing huge geopolitical shifts.

The political debates

The Congress started on 20th March in the afternoon at the Palau Reial de Pedralbes and was organised by the UEF Spain in close cooperation with the UEF Secretariat.

At the inaugural session, from the Spanish local authorities, the Mayor of Barcelona, Jaume Collboni and the Head of government of Catalonia Salvador Illa Governor addressed a strong political message underlining the support of Spain to a strong and independent European Union and the urgent need towards

a deepened integration. The Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares recalled the current geopolitical challenges, mentioning the war in Ukraine, the dramatic situation in Gaza and the new conflicts in Iran and Lebanon, underlining the need for a united European position on topline policy topics such as peace, international justice, multilateralism, respect of human rights, rule of law, and sustainability. He called for an active participation of the Union in the ongoing efforts for a new global order based on rules and international law.

The President Domenec Devesa gave an overview of the main achievements of the UEF since November 2023 and his election at the head of the Organisation in the Brussels Congress. He recalled the numerous actions and initiatives taken to deepen the European integration in particular since the adoption, in November 2023, by the European Parliament, of the landmark Resolution for EU treaty changes, pushing the Council for launching a Convention. He referred to the public positions systematically taken by the UEF on the main political events during the past two years and in particular since the Trump re-election in the White House. Since that day, the United States has become at best an unrealisable partner and, at worst, a hostile partner for the European Union. He underlined the key role of the UEF on relaunching in October 2025

the Jean Monnet Action Committee III in close cooperation with the Spinelli Group, Jean Monnet House and other partners. Concerning the internal situation of the Organization, he stressed that, despite the financial difficulties of the last year and the limited resources, the UEF supported the strengthening of national sections, the creation of new sections and promoted regional cooperation among federalist sections in particular in the Balkans.

The Congress confirmed the close and constructive cooperation with the Spinelli Group particularly in the past year during the Presidency of MEP Gabi Bischoff. The active participation during the debates of numerous members of the Spinelli Group (Sandro Gozi, Markus Ferber, Andreas Wechsler, Nicolas Farantouris and Thijs Reuten) was extremely useful for bridging grassroots activists' initiatives and formal policymaking actions in the European Parliament. This essential improvement for the democratic accountability of the European federalist movement has been one of the UEF objectives for many years and is also the result of continuous efforts of the previous Presidents of the Spinelli group (Daniel Freund, Lucas Mandl, Brando Benifei and Sandro Gozi).

Celebrating the 80th anniversary of the organisation, the Congress was a great opportunity to recall that the European project is a peace project and that the Union should continue promoting peace, respect of human rights, multilateralism and conflict resolutions based on international law.

In particular during the political debates, it was obvious that the main political obstacle for an effective action of the European Union globally is linked to the massive use (and abuse in some cases) of veto by Member States on strategic political decisions. Therefore priority should be given to the

abolition of the unanimity on key policy areas, in particular on security, enlargement, foreign and fiscal policies.

All participants agree that defence has become now the priority issue for the Union. Europe should start developing a holistic approach on security issues and advance with pragmatism on the creation of a Common Defence and Security Union starting with those of the Member States which have the political will and are ready to take clear commitments.

Reference was also made to the Draghi and Letta reports on competitiveness and innovation and underlining the importance of the finalisation of the internal market by 2028. The need for redefining priorities on energy policy and the acceleration of actions and investments towards renewable energy resources was also stressed linking it to the strategic autonomy of the Union as main political objective for the coming years. The effective implementation of measures taken the past years on green economy, climate change and sustainability should remain a priority. Defending the European social model in a period of global instability and raising of inequalities should also be included among the main priorities for the future with the adoption of additional actions and initiatives starting immediately with housing, the new urgency across big European cities for younger generations in particular.

The issue of the upcoming national elections in several Member States and the potential increasing influence of anti-European and populist movements in many Member States were discussed as well as the need for concrete pan-European coordinated actions fighting fake news, disinformation and influence of third countries. Federalists should push for further concrete actions which guarantee fair election processes, rights to access to information for all

and political debates focused on key issues for the European citizens.

In order to respond effectively to the new challenges, the participants in the Congress underlined the need for a strong EU budget and rejected proposals which can be seen as steps back on key Common Policies (such as common agriculture policy and regional coherence). They reaffirmed their support to the initiatives taken by the UEF during the ongoing negotiations for the multilateral Financial framework.

The participation of Guy Verhofstadt and Josep Borrell in the political debate was very much appreciated from all participants. Both well-known for their long commitment for the federalist cause and their straight talk, they referred to the current challenges and recommended a pragmatic way to advance the necessary institutional changes in the coming months.

The panel debate with the former Presidents of the Organisation, Jo Leinen, Mercedes Bresso, Andrew Duff, Elmar Brok and Sandro Gozi was a unique moment of emotion, reinforcing the unity of European federalists despite the different political families and ensuring continuity of the Movement. It was also a moment of deep reflection and exchange of views on important policy issues, as the former presidents shared with the participants their opinions and formulated ideas on future initiatives.

The Congress was also a great opportunity to underline the excellent cooperation between the UEF with JEF. In addition, the UEF reaffirmed its commitments to work closely with World Federalist movement towards the United Nations necessary changes, promoting peace, international justice, global democratic governance and multilateralism.

On the margin of the Congress, with the support of the Spanish section, a debate was organising on "rethinking Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation - the 30th anniversary of the Barcelona Process". Due to the current crisis and the conflicts in the East Mediterranean, the debate was a unique opportunity to recall historical links, reaffirm that the Mediterranean region is a priority for the European Union, discuss past achievements, launch ideas for further cooperation among civil society organisations in key policy areas (peace, security, environment, sustainable development, education and justice).

Elections and documents adopted

The Congress renewed the election by acclamation of Domenec Devesa as President for the next two years. This election rewarded Domenec's long-term commitment and engagement to federalist cause and particularly his hard work under difficult financial conditions the past period.

The Congress also elected 4 Vice Presidents, the Treasurer, an enlarged Executive Bureau Members with 8 members, the members of the arbitration board and a new Federal Committee.

The Congress adopted a new Manifesto, the first UEF Strategic Plan and two specific Resolutions on Foreign and Security Policy and on European debt.

The elaboration of the Manifesto was a long and intensive process which started in November 2025 during the Federal Committee meeting in Athens. It was a collective effort, summarizing the key priority objectives of the European federalists for the future European integration process towards a strong, democratic and sovereign European Federation which would be actively contributing to peace, justice, social

progress, sustainable development in the continent and in the world.

The Congress adopted the first UEF Strategic Plan for 2026-2030, an ambitious initiative of the former Executive Bureau, which reflects the legacy of the Organisation and aims at defining a forward-looking vision for the future. Based on experience of the past decades, the document listed the strategic objectives of the Organisation for the coming years, developed a clear methodology and specified the means to achieve the main priorities.

The Congress approved the creation of a new Dutch section.

Steps forwards

In Barcelona, in March 2026 the European federalists, in the spirit of responsibility based

on their long political activism for peace and prosperity in the continent, sent a strong political message calling for a more united Europe capable of defending itself, investing strategically, and acting with real political power. Because Europe can no longer afford paralysis while history accelerates around it, as said Mario Draghi.

Europe cannot remain fragmented if it wants to compete globally and protect its democratic governance and its social model in an increasingly unstable geopolitical environment. A political Union is needed urgently, a Union able to act as an autonomous geopolitical force, as a true global geopolitical actor. A Europe able to defend freedom, human rights, justice, the rule of law, pluralism, and international cooperation not only through words, but through economic, technological, and strategic strength.

Appeal: We Need a Union Within the Union*

Action Committee for the United States of Europe

We are in difficulties. That is a good sign. If we were not, we would never change anything. And making Europe means changing things.” – Jean Monnet

The European Union has delivered more than seventy years of peace and prosperity. However, it was not designed to operate in a world dominated by continental empires. A stronger core Union must now emerge. Europe is an ageing continent, lagging the United States and China in growth and productivity, suffering from low investment, and struggling to sustain its social model. At the same time, it faces a profound geopolitical shift: Russia threatens its security from the East, while its traditional ally, the United States, is becoming at best an unreliable partner and at worst a hostile power.

With just 5 per cent of the world’s population and a (so far) declining share of the global economy, only a more united Europe – economically and politically, capable of ensuring its own security and defence – can effectively confront the three continental powers seeking to divide the world into spheres of influence amid the collapse of the multilateral order. Yet, even after the aggression against Ukraine and Trump’s threats over Greenland, European leaders have not launched any bold initiative to scale up the Union.

The problem is not a lack of plans, but a lack of consensus among the twenty-seven. Letta and Draghi have proposed an important policy package to relaunch growth and competitiveness: completing the single market and mobilising public and private investment in key sectors. This should be a no-brainer.

Removing national barriers in financial services, telecommunications, digital markets, and energy would deliver a major boost to the EU economy. The same applies to the harmonisation of bankruptcy and corporate law.

We must also complete the Capital Markets Union and the Banking Union to retain European savings for investment within Europe. Such an economic programme would not only relaunch prosperity and improve living standards but also provide the technological and financial base needed to project power globally in defence of our values and interests.

However, this is not enough. Europe must build its own defence system, given the unreliability of the United States – and therefore of NATO – and must be able to take decisions by majority in foreign policy. The Treaty of Lisbon already provides avenues for both objectives, including the possibility of reform. Yet there is no progress.

Recent events illustrate the urgency. The war in Iran, the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, and the bombing in Lebanon showed how even issuing a joint statement can be paralysed by the veto of a single Member State. Earlier, Orbán’s latest veto – blocking a €90 billion Eurobond-financed loan to Ukraine and the 20th sanctions package against Russia – put the entire continent’s security at risk, despite Hungary representing just 1 per cent of EU GDP and 2 per cent of its population.

Furthermore, the Council has so far failed to agree on a single regulator for digital, telecommunications,

and financial services – essential for a true internal market – or on an European Deposit Insurance Scheme, let alone tax harmonisation. Powerful national interests continue to defend cross-border barriers and have effectively captured their governments, forming blocking minorities. Meanwhile, the Council often applies unanimity even where it is not legally required.

Is there a way forward? For some single market reforms, the Council can act by qualified majority voting. However, major initiatives in taxation, debt, foreign policy, and defence will likely remain blocked by national vetoes. Therefore, unless we are prepared to accept the status quo – and risk Europe's future as an independent actor – the time has come to create a federal vanguard of willing Member States. This is how we created Schengen and the single currency.

This vanguard would complete the internal market; pool sovereignty over the euro, taxation, and large-scale investments in technology, climate policy, and energy independence based on renewables, and defence products. It would establish a European Security Council, and a Defence System with civilian capabilities and its own chain of command, and adopt majority-based decision-making across the board, including in foreign policy, defence, taxation and financial matters. This "Union within the Union" could be established through a combination of enhanced cooperations with a homogeneous membership, supported by an instrumental treaty to regulate decision-making rules and ensure democratic accountability.

In such a dangerous world, where our security and survival are clearly at stake, we cannot accept that a single capital can hold everyone back. We are convinced that if Germany, France, the Benelux countries, Poland, and Spain take the lead in proposing this Union 2.0 – open to all – it will act as a

powerful magnet for other Member States that have so far been reluctant to support necessary reforms.

We therefore call on citizens to mobilise and on European leaders to act in the innovative spirit of the 9 May 1950 Declaration.

On behalf of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe: Guy Verhofstadt, President of European Movement International and former Prime Minister of Belgium; Domènec Ruiz Devesa, President of the Union of European Federalists and former Member of the European Parliament; Moritz Hergl, President of the Young European Federalists; Rosen Plevneliev, former President of Bulgaria; Petre Roman, former Prime Minister of Romania; Danuta Hübner, former European Commissioner for Regional Policy; Josep Borrell, President of CIDOB and former EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy; Willy Claes, former Secretary General of NATO, Belgium; Andrea Wechsler, Member of the European Parliament, Spinelli Group; Monica Frassoni, President of the European Centre for Electoral Support and former Co-President of the European Green Party; Thijs Reuten, Member of the European Parliament, Spinelli Group; Jo Leinen, former President of the European Movement International; Sandro Gozi, former Italian Secretary of State for Europe, Member of the European Parliament, Spinelli Group; Pierre Larroustourou, former Member of the European Parliament; Richard Corbett, former Member of the European Parliament; Christelle Savall, former President of the Young European Federalists; Giulia Rossolillo, Professor of European Union Law; Francisco Aldecoa, Professor of International Relations; Eric Pestel, Advisor to the President, Association Jean Monnet; Lieven Taillie, Honorary President of the European Journalist Association in Belgium; Michele Fiorillo, Philosopher, Coordinator of Civico Europa and Citizens Take Over Europe.

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The FPF among European Institutions: An Advocacy Journey for Israeli and Palestinians Federalist Groups

Dvir Aviam Ezra

Despite the outbreak of the war in the Middle East just the day before, the newly formed Israeli and Palestinian federalist groups – established with the support of the Federalist Peace Forum project – conducted an advocacy journey (and more) on March 2nd and 3rd, 2026, taking them to the heart of the European Union with various stops in Brussels. Participation, initially expected to include a dozen Middle Eastern federalists, was significantly reduced due to logistical issues caused by the Israeli-US attack on Iran and Lebanon. This aggression led to the closure of airspace in many countries of the region and the cancellation of numerous flights. Nevertheless, the event organizers decided to proceed as planned.

This aggression led to the closure of airspace in many countries across the region and the cancellation of numerous flights. Nevertheless, the event organizers decided to proceed as planned, in an attempt to boost motivation and hope in one of the darkest moments of our international order.

The three days in the heart of Europe followed the three main pillars of federalist activity in both Europe and the Middle Eastern region. The program included specific sessions tailored to different stakeholders: academics, policymakers, and civil society organizations.

The first session, focused on academic work, aimed to structure the “expert track” organized

last September in Ventotene. At that time, the idea was to complement the first Federalist Peace Forum with Israelis and Palestinians by assembling a group of intellectuals, experts, and academics who could support activists in their political elaboration. Overall, the results were positive: many of the experts present in Ventotene also joined the event in Brussels. Thanks to extensive mapping and outreach efforts, the network was also expanded. The session was divided into four round tables, each addressing different aspects of federalism in this context: institutions, economy and climate, justice, and security. At the end, a practical workshop was organized with the goal of setting a roadmap for future engagement.

As an overall assessment of this session, it is clear that it holds significant potential and represents an important space for activists and intellectuals to exchange ideas and develop new perspectives. However, the lack of both economic and organizational resources remains a major challenge for the track. As a final objective, the meeting discussed the idea of forming a network of research centers or think tanks willing to move beyond the two-state solution. This proposal was widely accepted by participants and could be a great opportunity for federalists to lead the process. However, for the moment, there has been no follow-up, something the Task Force on Global Federalism in JEF Europe plans to address soon, with the support of all the people that might be available among federalist networks.

The second session, the most high-level of the event, featured the participation of policymakers and paved the way for many follow-up meetings led by the two local groups, with the mediation of JEF Europe. The session itself, sponsored by Vice President of the European Parliament Pina Picierno (S&D), was attended by other policymakers, including MEP Hanna Neumann (Greens), MEP Hildegard Neumann (EPP), and EU Ambassador to Palestine Alexandre Strutzmann. In the following days, the two groups held meetings with many other MEPs – mainly from Renew, S&D, and The Left, as well as with members of the Council (MaMa group) and the Commission. Additional meetings with Belgian policymakers and the Palestinian Embassy were also organized.

From the many high-level meetings, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the extreme interest shown by counterparts (unanimous across this heterogeneous group) demonstrated a hunger for new solutions. On a certain level, it is clear that the current situation and the solutions on the current political agendas are insufficient to resolve such a long-standing and complex crisis. That said, the dialogues revealed that the positions of different political parties and national origins remain very different and, at times, irreconcilable. It is notable that, at a time when a united and strong European voice in defense of international law and against all forms of occupation is urgently needed, European politicians (and societies, probably) remain deeply fragmented. This makes it very difficult to advocate for the united voice that, as federalists, we believe the EU should have.

In conclusion, while the political meetings were strategically important for our federalist counterparts in terms of visibility and support, JEF Europe, and all European federalists, shall reflect on the fact that we are still not sufficiently influential in setting or influencing

a political agenda that must find a consensus among political forces, yet uncompromising on values and dignity.

The third session brought together around a dozen different civil society organizations (CSOs) present in Brussels. The main guest was the European Youth Forum, and the session's primary goal was to stress the importance of building networks among CSOs, including bridging the different networks of CSOs present around the world. For this reason, local networks such as ALLMEPP (online) and Land for All were also in attendance. During this moment of sharing experiences and ideas, it became clear that many challenges are shared, such as the increasing polarization of our societies or the efforts by far-right governments to cut youth funding. Once again, JEF Europe and its Task Force's conviction that the area of intervention for building bridges should not be limited to Europe's borders, proved crucial and yielded positive results and appreciation.

As a conclusion, the Brussels event was crucial for the growth of the group and the political project. Formally closing the first project funded by the Council of Europe, the two groups of local activists are now called to stand on their own, continuing the important work they are doing in their communities. From the beginning, as Europeans, we have a major goal: to support their activities and to channel their political messages toward our European institutions. The historical moment in which we are living compels us to increase our efforts in this direction.

What appears to be the end of the international system as we know it must lead federalists around the world to unite and grow, preparing for the challenges ahead. In this specific context, the Israeli general elections (2026) and the Palestinian presidential elections (2027) could be two important battlegrounds for

the federalist cause. We hope to demonstrate that the community of people opposed to the current worldview of the governments in Tel Aviv and Washington is not a minority. Even in countries and cultures as different and divided as Israel, Palestine, or Lebanon, the current strategy, marked by war, occupation, forced displacement, and genocide, undertaken by Israel and the US, among others, in Iran, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, does not represent the will of the populations.

If we are convinced of this, federalists around the world should stand with oppressed peoples, striving to connect all political and

social forces that oppose the aforementioned worldview. In doing so, we aim to reverse the trend and offer a genuine alternative.

It is clear that the challenge is immense, especially considering that federalism, like all transnational theories, must continually deconstruct and adapt itself to be applied in different geographical and cultural contexts. Yet, precisely because of our movement's awareness of this approach, and its farsighted, inclusive vision that embraces differences rather than excluding them, it could play the extremely needed role of bridging different experiences with shared values, allowing an alternative to emerge.

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