



In Sibiu, EU leaders must launch a new pact for a fair, resilient and a sustainable Europe

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In a little less than three weeks, more than 400 million Europeans, the largest electorate in the world after India, will go to the polls to elect 751 members of parliament in an election that is probably the most decisive for the future of Europe since 1979, the first time we went to vote for our transnational parliament.

For the past two years, EU and national leaders have been working relentlessly to define a vision for Europe. Several scenarios were outlined by the European Commission. Discussions and consultations were organised, plans sketched, solutions formulated. Never before there has been such a vivid, open and frank debate on the Europe we want and the one we want to leave to the next generations.

Yet, much of this discourse on the future of Europe was hijacked by Eurosceptics and marred by a growing, devastating populism.

Under the mantle of nationalism, populists promised to defend the interests of the majority against immigrant minorities and out-of-touch elites. Our values were questioned, the right to do good was not perceived by many people as the core of our political action.

Nationalism is an ideological poison, said not so long ago German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. This poison risks posing a health risk to our democracy as populism attacks not merely elites and establishments but also the very idea of political pluralism.

This is why, European leaders meeting in Sibiu on the 9th of May—Europe day—must quickly identify the antidote ahead of the European elections on 23-26 May.

Many politicians have been at a loss when it comes to countering populism. Increasingly, they have adopted a stance that some call destruction through imitation, meaning outflank far-right competitors with tough talk on refugees and immigration in order to regain consensus. That narrative has done serious damage to European democracy in recent months, pushing people to vote for even more extremist movements.

Instead, liberals should present value choices that can tackle inequality. The time has come to offer a vision, moving away from the 'State First' doctrine fueling hatred across Europe and the United States.

It's not by closing borders, building walls and throwing out globalization that we can address the huge economic, social and ecological transformations upon us.

As protests around Europe tells us, the EU can get stronger if mainstream politicians push a new vision for a fair, resilient, innovative, inclusive and sustainable growth, rather than 'nationalistic' determination.

This vision exists. It is called Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, based on Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union, voted and agreed on by everyone. This is the matrix for the strategy. And if the Member States and European civil society fully embrace the strategy with an ambitious EU budget, it will enable us to embark upon a positive economic, social, environmental and institutional path towards renewal, a true rEUnaissance.

The way it happened in the 15th century, when the Renaissance was a powerful and vast humanistic revolution, which re-established the real dimension of culture in its concrete relation with science, the art of government and the organisation of economic and social life and founded the modern transformation of Europe.

Today, it can happen again. Europe needs a new model of growth which is qualitatively and creatively different from what we have at present, that is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable, and able to foster and support convergence of the digital and ecological transitions in our countries and societies.

Competitiveness and sustainability are not in opposition as the social and environmental aspects are part and parcel of the definition of competitiveness. Competitiveness must not be defined only in terms of quantity and price, but also with reference to European values, quality and sustainability.

Agenda 2030 could provide the social and economic contract for the 21st century, aimed at eradicating poverty, ensuring decent living and working conditions for all and reducing social inequalities, ensuring the sustainability of the planet and – above all – a new era of innovation and progress in every field for a Europe open to the world.

Sustainable investment is a key instrument for steering and fostering the process. It has to stimulate high-quality job creation, renewable energy, affordable and accessible green public transport, eco-designed digital technology, research and innovation. This is particularly crucial for young people and regions which have high unemployment or are experiencing structural changes.

If European companies fulfil their role and responsibilities and act as leaders in the eyes of the rest of the world if the competitiveness and economic sustainability of our European system is redefined in respect of our planet, we will strengthen democracy and liberalism.

Our young people, Greta among them, are telling us in no uncertain terms that the winning recipe is to bring together sustainable development, young people and civic commitment.

There are no doubts we will be able to find the investments needed to develop the economies of the 21st century and give European voters the option to go back to the nation state or shape the new global order. This will be our renaissance.

Published in:

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