

## **A call for a new European social contract**

The last ten years have been traumatic for the European peoples and the Union. Three major crises, the financial and economic, the refugee and now the pandemic, have challenged the well-being, the institutions and the values of the European Union, peace and solidarity. All three have developed in the background of the developing ecological and climate emergency. The response of the elites to these crises has been inadequate, piecemeal and contingent. The lack of clear and visionary leadership has eroded the trust of Europeans and has led to the rise of the ethnopopulist, xenophobic and eurosceptic right wing threatening the future of the Union.

In the financial crisis, the South was obliged to introduce austerity policies that devastated the social state and economic rights, undermining the dignity of people and the integrity of public services. In the refugee crisis, the value of solidarity was abandoned by leaders who strive for the return of aggressive national sovereignty. In the pandemic, the borders of Fortress Europe are becoming internal borders dividing the North from the South, separating people in this hour of existential risk and undermining the values and ideas upon which Europe is founded.

As the European states prepare their exit from the lockdown, it is time to restate our fundamental values and act on them. Our societies weathered the pandemic by mobilizing public services and the state, foremost the national health systems, and by calling on our rich traditions of solidarity, equality, social justice and humanitarianism. Solidarity, protecting the dignity of all, equal sharing of the benefits and burdens of the Union and democratic renewal should guide the post-pandemic world.

To this end, we call for the creation of a European democratic and progressive front that will revitalize the foundational values of the Union and the trust of its citizens. This front will start a major public debate with the civil societies, political forces, social movements and trade unions of member states and will propose a new pan-European social contract to guide us in the new period. The latter will ensure that the costs of the post-pandemic reconstruction, for saving employment and enterprise will be equitably shared between North and South, the rich and the poor.

The democratic and progressive front will fight to end neoliberal austerity and lessen inequalities, to make permanent the current increases in funding and respect for the health services and public goods, to protect and guarantee employment and labour rights for all citizens, to press for the green reorganization of our economies and societies, finally, to strengthen and deepen the democratic and institutional framework of the Union. We need to increase the powers of European Parliament, to foster a closer and active link between it and the national Parliaments, as well as strengthen the move towards convergence, against the non-transparent 'executive federalism' and national withdrawal that developed as a response to the crises.

We are at a crucial turning point. If Europe returns to its previous economic, social and political dispensation it will fatally undermine its future. Europe will be democratic, progressive, social and green or it will not survive.

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