



CONTRIBUTION TO THE DISCUSSION ON THE WHITE BOOK ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Why is the White Book on the future of Europe inadequate?

Once again it looks like within the EU institutions - the Commission first - the right hand does not know what the left does. The White Paper does not address a number of key points and therefore once again risks to undermine the EU's "good name" among its citizens. It does not refer to the United Nations Agenda 2030, signed just a year and a half ago, does not link any of the scenarios to the European Pillar of Social Rights or the Paris Agreements on Climate Change. In the 5 scenarios there is no reference to the European Social Model - which for many decades has been one of the foundations of the European construction –there is no reference to gender and educational policies, to the fight against poverty and social exclusion; there are no references to the fight against inequalities or any proposal to resolve the democratic deficit, there is no commitment to leave no one behind. There is no specific reference to the minimum European wage, to adequate and dignified minimum income, to the construction of a European tax system, there is no clear reference to human rights or to the European Charter of Rights. We were astonished by the fact that the two issues, migration and security are always treated as a single theme, as if they concided. Finally, we find in the 5 scenarios a lack of commitment toward the participation of civil society associations, the only ones that can bridge the gap between EU citizens and EU institutions.

What Europe needs is a strong policy against poverty and for employment, against inequality and for gender equality, education and against the climate change. In other words, we must go back to the EU's origins. Any scenario that does not include these factors is sure to fail and disappoint once and for all who live in our territory.

More than a scenario we need active policies

We need active policies (based on the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Agenda 2030, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Paris Agreements and the European Social Model) as a real start towards an ambitious and comprehensive journey able to significantly improve the quality of life of all those living on EU and those living outside. If this does not happen, the EU will never be perceived again as the engine of growth and equality and as a world power fighting against poverty and for the respect of human rights, for sustainable development and democracy.

We need strong, democratic and supranational institutions promoting fair and solid social and economic policies that recognize the limits of GDP as a measure of progress and adopt a set of social, economic, environmental and governance indicators upon which the member states take their decisions.

If all this means a new, sixth scenario, this is what we need.

EU Treaties must be reviewed

Social and anti-poverty measures are the “great absentee” of the treaty as it stands now.

It is true that some policies could be pursued with the existing treaties - if there were a political will to implement them. EU could work toward the realization of an European welfare (in the context of a "social semester"), could put an end to austerity policies, could work for the achievement of a "no carbon" society, for a long-term European social investment policy, for a policy in favor of those fleeing wars, hunger and environmental disasters (with no distinction between asylum seekers and economic migrants), could develop an international aid policy that takes into account differences in political regimes in third countries, could adopt a policy for the fight against poverty inside and outside the European Union.

However, we are convinced that the Lisbon Treaty - as it has been designed - cannot guarantee, in the medium and long term, what we described in the previous paragraph and that citizens expect from the EU. Neither it can ensure a supranational democracy within which people living in the Union can recognize themselves.

We don't like the idea of a two-speed Europe but we must come to terms with member states that slow down progress at European level because of short-term national interests. The new treaty should allow member states that want to go ahead with social reforms and want to reinforce the political union to do so. The new treaty should provide for an automatic system of penalties against those member states that sign agreements and then do not respect them (see, for example, the agreement on relocation of migrants).

The role of organized civil society

Organized civil society should play a key role in linking the EU with its citizens as we are the only ones that can reach all territories and all people and, thus, act as real "EU ambassadors". Therefore, it is essential for the future of the EU, that its citizens are consulted regularly, through structured dialogue. It is also essential that organized civil society's suggestions and proposals are taken into account and, if not adopted, a clear and transparent reason is given.

EU needs to be united

To ensure that citizens feel that they actually belong to Europe and renew their commitment for a united Europe, the democratically elected leaders and the European institutions at all levels are the first ones that must be united and show a clear unity of intents. When divided, as has been the case in recent years, there are no communication campaigns or social media that will make Europeans feel that they own Europe and the EU institutions, from citizens-friendly become foes of the people.

It is then, as shown in the last years, that national leaders can easily use the EU as the scapegoat for any mistake or wrong policies they enact.

The future of Europe- if Europe is to have a future - depends on how and if its leaders will be able to give citizens and people living in the EU a hope for a better future. All this seems to us all the utmost important at a historic moment like this where Europe can no longer count on its historical allies and must absolutely propose itself to the world as a beacon of civilization, solidarity, progress and sustainability.



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