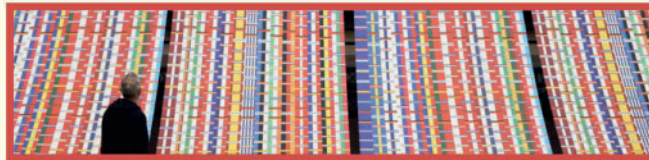Forum Disuguaglianze Diversità

QUALE EUROPA

Capire, discutere, scegliere

a cura di Elena Granaglia e Gloria Riva

"What Europe."

Ed. Elena Granaglia and Gloria Riva

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The [Forum on Inequality and Diversity,](#) an alliance of research and civic organizations, has decided to take part in June European elections by putting on the table thirteen ideas/proposals that could help bring the European Union out of the stalemate by updating its mission in the direction of social and environmental justice. Sure enough, Treaty changes are needed to bring European Union in line with a current, complex, and uncertain time, changes that can increase the democratic role of the European Parliament. But no alibi is allowed. The European Parliament is a very alive Institution, where a truly, informed, heated, open, reasonable debate, takes place, across parties, among its members. Therefore, a larger number of progressive MEPs converging and pushing some needed radical proposals can make a difference. The ForumDD ideas/proposals can be used to put the candidates to the test. Here is a synthesis of each chapter.

Institutions: the context for the new European Parliament

(GLORIA RIVA)

There is an ultraconservative wind blowing over Europe as it prepares for the June vote. Among the reasons for this shift to the right is the rigidity of EU institutions, which are proving unfit for purpose in pursuing social and environmental justice goals. One of the most critical issues is undoubtedly the requirement that heads of member states vote unanimously in the Council. Unanimity is notoriously hard to achieve, and a single vote is enough to block everything, especially decisions in strategic areas such as the budget, fiscal and foreign policy, immigration, and welfare. Unanimous voting is anachronistic: the time has come to introduce majority voting. The Commission also faces critical issues: visibility and democratic legitimacy are needed in the selection process for the president and its commissioners. One proposal is for the Parliament to select them, in order to reduce both the influence of lobbies on the Commission and the conditioning of individual member states. The Parliament also needs to be granted greater decision-making power over important issues, decisions which are all too often delegated to the Council. Having said all this, there are no alibis for members elected in the upcoming EU elections: there is ample opportunity for them within the existing EU institutions to make a difference. They can work together on specific issues and on proposals for tackling them, such as those put forward in this book, and invest time and energy in their own groups. They could even construct together political spaces that might bring about supranational European parties with their own programs tailored to European needs while addressing national demands.

Macroeconomic policies. Bringing Europe back up to speed

(FRANCESCO SARACENO)

Europe's macroeconomic institutions are the products of a bygone era. In fact, the EU's macroeconomic governance was brought about in the 1990s on the basis of a belief peculiar to neoliberalism — the author calls it "The New Consensus" — that, once distortions in the way they function were corrected, markets alone would lead to equilibrium and that economic policy should play a limited role. The sequence of crises that began in 2008, however, gradually prompted a rethinking in macroeconomics. Europe got off to a late start: not surprisingly, the Eurozone was the only area among the large advanced economies to experience a second recession between 2012 and 2013. The Covid pandemic seemed to have produced a turnaround that in a matter of weeks led to the approval of the Next Generation EU program, which — despite serious difficulties in its implementation —is nonetheless the most innovative tool the EU has introduced in recent decades. But momentum quickly wore off as inflation turned the spotlight back to the issue of debt and the debate regressed to focussing on controlling public finances. The result is that the new "stability pact" initially envisioned by the Commission has been turned into an empty shell that, beyond a barrage of complex clauses, has reverted to imposing annual numerical constraints and discouraging the massive public investment required by transitions. With this pact in place, Europe cannot meet the challenges it faces. Work is needed to build a difficult consensus around a proposal that would give the EU centralized budgetary capacity to implement global and industrial public goods policies.

Financial resources.
Strengthening the EU's own resources

(Vieri Ceriani)

At present, the main resources financing the EU budget, accounting for more than 70 percent of total revenue, are national contributions paid as a percentage of Gross National Income. By contrast, the only harmonized European tax, VAT, provides about 12 percent of the revenue. Although national contributions give the financing of the EU an intergovernmental character, in order to achieve a fully federal arrangement, the EU would have to expand its fiscal capacity and endow the European Parliament with the power to impose European taxes on member states, to be paid directly to the EU budget. Significant steps forward would be the adoption of a harmonized corporate tax (BEFIT) and the enhancement of VAT. In this regard, a great deal of work has already been done in Europe. Now efforts need to be made on implementation. Finally, environmental taxation, is also important, although it is a resource that is bound to diminish progressively. As environmental protection increases, in fact, revenue will be reduced since the tax bases currently derived from polluting materials will decrease and ultimately vanish.

Inequalities.
Multiple socioeconomic fractures

(Salvatore Morelli)

After a period of convergence, disparity in per capita income among the various regions of the 15-member European Union (that is, before enlargement included Eastern European countries), began to grow again in the 1990s. The economic and financial crisis of 2008-2009 drastically interrupted the process of economic convergence that new members had contributed to in the 28-member EU as a whole. Income and wealth inequality among individuals and the poverty rate within single countries also rose sharply after the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, while inherited wealth doubled between 1995 and 2020, taxation has been reduced. By contrast, albeit in different ways in different countries, disparities in social welfare indicators —such as women's participation in the labour market, school dropout rates, and CO2 emissions — have been significantly reduced. Not by enough, however, and in the case of Italy, far from enough. These dynamics of increasing regional disparities and interpersonal economic inequalities have already had profound implications for economic and social cohesion within the EU, undermining popular support for the European project and increasingly strengthening backing for ominously nationalistic and authoritarian parties.

Cohesion: the goal and tool that gives meaning to the EU

(Fabrizio Barca, Sabina De Luca)

The EU was born with a strong vision of cohesion, in the sense of mutual adaptation and solidarity among citizens. How else to seek peace? The "place-based method" — that is, public policies sensitive to people in places — adopted following the 2009 Agenda has made an effective contribution to this cohesion. However, implementation of the strategy has been far from satisfactory. The place-based method has not been turned into a banner of European cohesion policy, which has preferred the simpler logic of "ready-to-be-implemented projects" with quick spending that produces wages, profits and substantial rents but which is no more than compensation to people and places experiencing the distortions described in the chapter "Inequalities. Multiple socio-economic fractures." In the face of rising inequality and fragility,

such approach may look like a positive policy response. But it is not: the effects are harmful in the medium and long term. The essential tools for implementing a place-based approach are also missing in the NRP. The responsibility of the next European Parliament is, therefore, to reinvigorate the cohesion mandate by returning to the European method of place-sensitive policies by means of a series of timely actions proposed in this book.

Welfare.
The EU as a Social Union

(Elena Granaglia)

The European Pillar of Social Rights marked a turning point in the approach to the social dimension of the EU by reaffirming not only the complementarities between social and economic dimensions, but also the centrality of the justice rationale supporting welfare. The risk of results falling far short of expectations is, however, ever-present. Countering that risk requires considering the EU as a union for social and environmental justice. Social policies certainly contribute to growth, but, as John Rawls stated in A *Theory of Justice*: "Justice is the first virtue of institutions." The ultimate aim of social policies must be to ensure that everyone, everywhere, has access to decent living conditions. With this in mind, the EU should work in three main directions. First, translating the principles of the Pillar into strategic missions, strengthening the EU's capacity to accompany member countries in the implementation of these missions, by developing, for example, appropriate indicators, exchanging information, providing technical support, and introducing social conditionality clauses. Second, the space for direct EU policies should be strengthened, from expanding European funding, to programs that benefit all countries; from strengthening directives in areas where the EU's joint work is most developed and/or issues most directly affect the functioning of the single market, to the creation of "embryos" of European welfare. Third, avoiding the temptation of hovering over all these areas with a top-down approach is essential. Social dialogue should be supported and a more comprehensive participation of citizens and active citizenship organizations in the processes of both policy-making and monitoring the implementation phase should be encouraged.

Health.
A European public good

(Massimo Florio)

The EU can be a bulwark against the privatization of universal public services and should play a decisive role in reviving them. This is not an easy task, but it is possible. There are three connected factors looming over Europe in the coming decades that are likely to have disruptive effects on health: the sheer numbers of the elderly, the relative aging of the population, and the rising cost of care. Moreover, the way the Covid pandemic was managed has demonstrated the highly negative effects of the concentration of knowledge on the cost of vaccines and thus on the resilience of national health systems. Precisely by building on the lessons of the pandemic, however, it is possible to identify some antidotes. These include, first and foremost, the creation of a supranational, Europe-wide public infrastructure, modelled on CERN, to: conduct research; produce and distribute drugs, vaccines and other goods; source knowledge-based biomedical services; and create a new generation of researchers, doctors, nurses and qualified health personnel, in acutely short supply today, whose training and professional life should be European, with synergies between national and supranational levels. We also need a network of medical and nursing faculties with European status, on the model of the European University Institute in Fiesole. In the current legislature, prompted by a proposal put forward by ForumDD, the European Parliament has made some moves in this direction, despite lobbying by powerful interests. It is crucial to complete the task as it is a litmus test of the genuine social commitment of future elected members.

Climate Crisis.
For a just and rapid transition

(Vittorio Cogliati Dezza, Rossella Muroni)

The European climate and ecological transition policies of recent years faithfully reflect the EU's potential to benefit its citizens. At the same time, however, there have been uncertainties, contradictions and dangerous changes in direction: a constant stop-and-go, first envisaging scenarios and pointing to goals that would place the EU at the forefront of the world; then, as soon as the first concrete steps are taken, holding back, contradicting and blocking the process that then becomes ensnared by the cross-fire of vetoes. It is an obstacle course conditioned by the clash between two competing schools of thought: on the one hand, the advocates of accelerating change and, on the other, the defenders of the status quo. The former pushing for innovation in production and consumption systems; the latter, a sentinel for fossil fuel interests. In this context, the EU has already partly identified what steps to take. "All" that is needed is to apply and develop them consistently. Every effort must be made to implement them in order to achieve a just transition. That is, one that restores social security to citizens. It needs to do this rapidly, because the time is ripe (in fact, time is running out, given rising temperatures) for making substantial changes to the current industrial model, especially in manufacturing and construction.

Corporate Governance.
Social responsibility and economic democracy

(Lorenzo Sacconi)

Strategic corporate decisions should pursue, as parts of the corporate best interest, social and environmental goals. As early as 2020, the Commission — anticipating many member states, including Italy —launched a consultation aimed at defining a sustainable corporate governance for large European companies. For the first time the idea was to introduce, by a mandatory rule of European law, a new definition of corporate directors' duties that extended their responsibilities multiple stakeholders, beyond capital investors, Therefore, including first of all fiduciary duties toward corporate employees, in a perspective of intergenerational social, and environmental sustainability. This norm was then inserted in the first EU Commission proposal of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), approved by the EU Parliament, but it was rejected by the European Council. Therefore, the initiative for sustainable corporate governance should be reinvigorated, making a clear statement that social and environmental sustainability should be understood as part of the goals the company pursues from within, and not just as a constraint imposed from outside. This would be complementary to the second element of a sustainable governance, i.e. the empowerment of workers and non-financial stakeholders in corporate decision processes. A resolute step in the direction of economic democracy, related but more inclusive than the previous European experiences, would be the institution of Works and Citizenships Company Councils, a proposal the Forum DD has been insistently advocating in the last few years.

Digital Technology.
Between data protection and data sharing

(Giorgio Resta)

The governance of digital technologies has decisive strategic value on economic, social and military levels. In this regard, three models are compared: the neoliberal model, typical of the United States; the statist model, typical of China; and the rights-based model, typical of the European Union. The EU's adoption of the latter model has allowed it to take on a global leadership role in the regulation of new technologies, especially in the fields of data protection (GDPR) and artificial intelligence (AI Act). However, the European data governance system has also revealed its limitations. Historically focused on protecting individuals from the dangers of privacy breaches in public and private actors, it has neglected the importance of data sharing in the interest of public policies for social inclusion and progress. Moreover, despite GDPR, digital platforms have gained almost total control over information flows. Finally, the EU has disproportionately expanded the scope of protection for intellectual property rights, to the serious detriment of the intangible public domain and other constitutional freedoms, primarily freedom of information. It is thus up to the new European Parliament to address these issues: promoting action to revise the existing regulations in order to achieve more advanced forms of balance between protection and data sharing; encouraging the initiative of collective entities that operate in a non-profit environment to play an intermediary role between individuals and platforms; and countering the uncontrolled proliferation of intellectual property rights.

Gender Equality.
For a Feminist Europe

(Carola Carazzone, Lella Palladino)

Rather than on regulations, gender discrimination in today's EU is based on cultural stereotypes, psychological constraints and patriarchal social behaviours still deeply rooted in the mindsets of men and women alike. It is thus necessary to eradicate the cultural and psychological roots of inequality by including specific policies dedicated to men and to a culture that values difference, where all minorities or categories "minoritized" by the hetero-normative model have a place. Proposals include, first and foremost, a systematic gender mainstreaming strategy that interprets gender issues in relation to the sphere of public power. This strategy should be endowed with adequate financial resources and included in every European policy, from transport to social cohesion, from digitalization to migration. We also need empowerment policies that aim to expand individual and social capabilities. In order to achieve these goals, the following actions are necessary: implementing effectively the Istanbul Convention, alongside the new directive on gender-based violence proposed by the Commission in March 2022; recognizing feminicide as a specific criminal offense in all member states; promoting structural programs in relationship education; making mandatory gender audits that assess gender equity in policies, programs and budgets, and offer training in implicit stereotypes to institutions and organizations; certifying gender competencies for teachers, educators, journalists, magistrates, lawyers, police officers, and doctors.

Migration.
Reversing Common Sense

(Marco De Ponte)

I numeri del fenomeno migratorio in Europa mettono in discussione la retorica diffusa dell'invasione e mostrano come il percorso delle persone migranti non termina in alcun modo al momento dell'ingresso nel territorio europeo, o con il rimpatrio, ma dura mesi, o anche anni, a seconda delle politiche di prima "accoglienza" messe in campo dai diversi Stati membri, molto eterogenee tra loro. Ridurre i gravi limiti delle politiche migratorie europee è possibile e per farlo possono essere adottate una serie di misure concrete: rafforzamento del finanziamento per le politiche migratorie su scala europea; potenziamento di processi decentrati di adattamento basati sulle partnership tra istituzioni centrali e locali e organizzazioni della società civile; incremento e diversificazione delle vie legali di accesso; introduzione di meccanismi forti di monitoraggio. Affinché simili misure diventino realtà, è essenziale il ribaltamento della narrazione pubblica prevalente, oggi costruita sulle categorie dell'emergenza e del pericolo. Anche la strategia spesso banalmente definita "aiutiamoli a casa loro", che nella pratica si limita oggi a fornire denaro ai sistemi di sicurezza e polizia a Stati extraeuropei al fine di impedire i flussi, dovrebbe decisamente cambiare e favorire la crescita dell'economia locale, coinvolgendo le stesse persone migranti di ritorno e, in generale, gli attori economici territoriali per pianificare una vera strategia di indipendenza economica dei paesi da cui partono i flussi migratori.

Europe-world.
The roots and international mission of the EU

(Ugo Pagano)

The image of Europe outside Europe has been bipolar for centuries. Inside its borders, Europe has developed freedom, democracy and an open science, which is now a global good shared by all. But outside, Europe has also been the architect of aggressive colonialism, a cruel slave trade and multiple acts of economic rapacity. It has recently behaved in a similar fashion when, during the Covid pandemic, and despite the European Parliament's vote against it, it opposed the suspension of vaccine patents for Covid 19 proposed by India and South Africa to the World Trade Organization, and proved decisive thanks to its 26 votes. This has to change. Greater global knowledge sharing would not only give the EU a more prosperous economy and a fairer division of wealth. It would also reduce the risks of a proliferation of the military industry and the escalation of military conflict. The EU needs to regain an international role by adopting policies that emphasize the strong link between knowledge sharing and international cooperation. It could also count on the support of the Global South to this end. Is it so hard to achieve? Absolutely not. The EU was created to put an end to millennia of internecine wars. For this reason, it should propose a radical reform of the agreements that coined the term "intellectual property" and went on to hyper-protect the concept, along lines that ForumDD has long indicated.