



FRESH THINKING

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The wake-up call for democracy in Europe

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES





It was a bit windy, excitement was in the air. The place was Gothenburg, mid-May 2004. But for a band of Swedish social democratic students the geographical position didn't matter. Europe was a common democratic arena to us, and we had come to prove our point.

There was a buzz surrounding the Ullevi stadium. Valencia, coached by the shrewd Rafa Benitez, was about to play Olympic Marseille who had Barthez in goal and Drogba up front. It was the final of the UEFA Cup, which our political flyers duly noted. But our core message as we spread the word around was about another competition to be decided some three weeks later.

The flyers had the same message in Spanish, French and Swedish. In June that year, the second biggest election ever (after India) would take place – to our own European Parliament. The EU had just got 10 new member states; 342 million people were eligible to vote; football fans in 25 countries could cheer for the same team: the members of the Party of European Socialists (PES). We urged Valencia's fans to vote for a young Spanish progressive (Laura), we informed fans of L'OM that our socialist friend David deserved their vote. And we thought the Swedes should vote for Åsa Westlund – who as we speak is serving her second term as an MEP.

After the match I called Sweden's news agency TT and asked what they would write about the exciting pan-European campaign outside Ullevi that

I had informed them about. "Nothing", was the response. But the disappointment I felt eight years ago as I gave up trying to convince TT to write about our flyer campaign is nothing compared to the wake-up call European democracy needs today.

Governments are dominated by conservatives. Europeans are tortured by austerity and the financial crisis. The trust in political institutions, both national and European, is collapsing. Elections often see a mix of low turnout and the growth of the political extremes – or new alternatives. As you have already guessed, we are devoting our third issue of Fresh Thinking in 2012 to Europe's current democratic challenges.

Per Wirtén, who worked with us on our issue about the new racism in Europe, frames this broad theme in a strong essay built around a journey that his family took through eastern Europe this summer (p. 8). His observations are optimistic regarding the EU's own power which has transformed the union's eastern regions, but he also sends out an alarm to democratise and politicise the EU.

In the spirit of Alexis de Tocqueville we have talked to US political analyst – Vivien A Schmidt – to get a pair of fresh eyes on how progressives should tackle the EU's democratic deficit (p. 30). Our photo essay brings us to Greece, the cradle of democracy, where you'll find all the democratic challenges from poverty and xenophobia to a lack of trust. But also a demos ready to rise up (p. 16).

We're also covering the possible Europeanisation of politics (p. 26) and we think that progressives must try to understand the attraction of other parties. Turn to page 22 and you'll learn that the Pirate Party is not just about the internet, stupid!

As Europe's progressives gather for the PES congress it was important for us to include a balanced piece on the recent developments in Hungary and Romania (p. 25). Are the democratic and ethical standards we expect in our own political family higher than the ones across the aisle where, until recently, Silvio Berlusconi was one of the most prominent leaders? I certainly hope so.

Personally, I expect the PES congress to enable what we call a "Hix-scenario" (p. 15) where the European elections in 2014 will be more transparent, politicised and pan-European. Simply put: In the spirit of that great day in Gothenburg.

Eric Sundström
Editor-in-Chief



Front cover and photo essay by

Jannis Keil | Photographer

Jannis Keil is a German freelance photographer and multimedia journalist based in Berlin. He came to photography because of his interest in the underdog and is convinced that it is possible to understand the world's problems by looking closely at the lives of ordinary people.

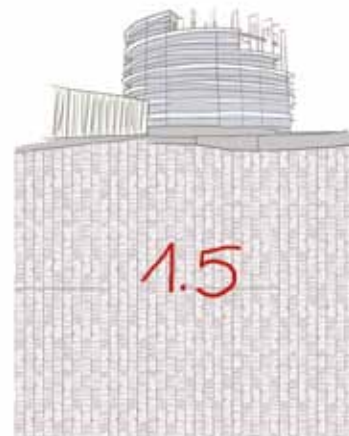
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43%: the turnout for the 2009 European Parliament elections, compared to the 61.99% turnout in the nine EU member states in 1979.

Source: European Parliament



1.5: the cost, in billions of euros, to maintain the EU Parliament in 2012.

Source: EU Budget



6: the number of Social Democratic heads of state in the EU. They are Helle Thorning-Schmidt in Denmark, Francois Hollande in France, Werner Faymann in Austria, Robert Fico in Slovakia, Elio Di Rupo in Belgium and Victor Ponta in Romania.

24: the percentage of EU-27 citizens who undertake a voluntary activity. The majority of those (24%) are engaged in voluntary work in a sports club or a club for outdoor pursuits. The lowest number of volunteers (5%) are engaged in professional organisations, trade unions or political parties.

Source: Eurobarometer, 2011

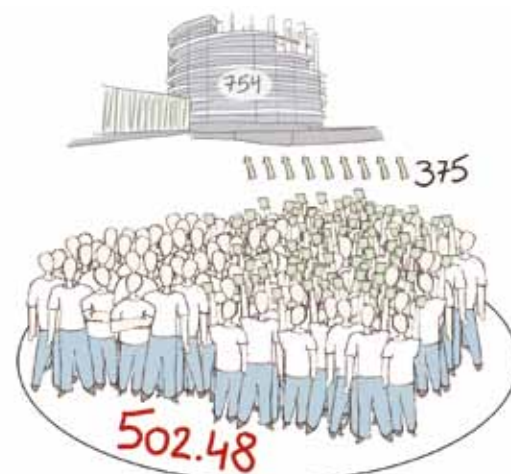


22: the number of elections in EU countries in 2012 – at both national and regional level.

Source: Wikipedia

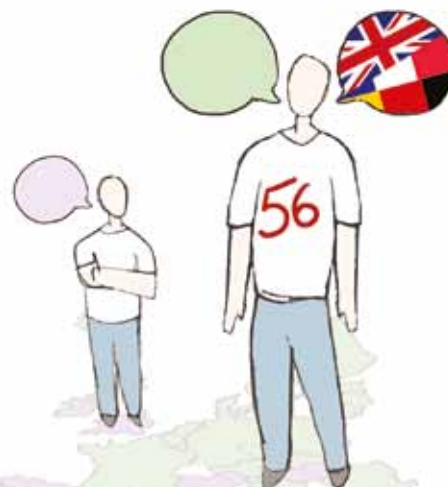
502.48: the number of people, in millions, who live in the EU-27. 375 million of those are entitled to vote. There are 754 members of the European Parliament.

Source: Eurostat; The European Parliament





13: the number of EU member states in 2012 that weren't democracies 40 years ago in 1972. They are: Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic (which at that time was known as Czechoslovakia and joined with its neighbour Slovakia), Spain and Hungary.



56: the percentage of Europeans who spoke another language besides their mother tongue in 2005. The survey included all member states as well as Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey. The most popular second languages are English, French and German, followed by Spanish and Russian. Only six member states had a majority of mono-linguists: Ireland, the UK, Italy, Hungary, Portugal and Spain.

Source: Eurobarometer

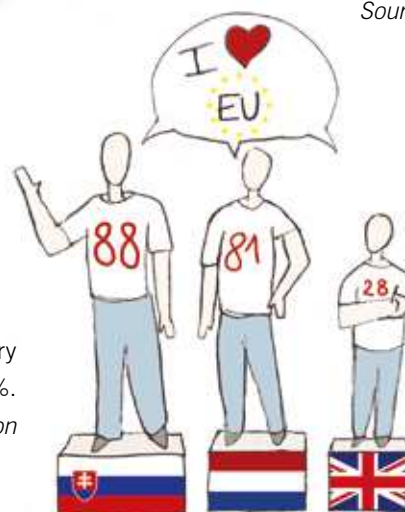


43: the mean percentage turnout of the EU in the latest EU Parliament election in 2009. Luxembourg with its obligatory vote had a 90.75% turnout, Cyprus had a turnout of 59.4% and Spain had a 44.9% turnout. The UK's turnout was 34.7% and Slovakia only managed 19.64%.

Source: European Parliament

88: the percentage of Slovaks who are in favour of their country being in the EU, compared to Holland's 81% and England's 28%.

Source: European Union



46.8: the percentage decline of members of Germany's Social Democratic Party since 1990. Britain's Labour Party reached its lowest membership level since 1900 in 2007 with 176,891. Its peak was in 1997 with 405,000 members.

Source: Freie Universität Berlin, Oskar Niedermayer, 2011; The Daily Telegraph

Illustrations by Rita Kohel



The EU grew out of the ashes of the second world war. Seventeen of its 27 member states are in the eurozone.

Defining democracy in the face of crisis

Travelling to the eastern fringes of Europe enabled **Per Wirtén** to recall Europe's dark past that gave birth to the EU and to focus on the problems it faces today. Here he asks what needs to be done to save the union and keep its promise alive.

We travelled through the eastern parts of the EU this summer. On the road from Vilnius to Bialystok there was hardly any room for our little car among all the big, long-distance lorries. We continued on winding country roads, through villages with wooden churches, past fields where storks looked for frogs and into the wild Bialowieska forest because the children desperately wanted to see large European bison in a small zoo. We followed the border towards Belarus and Ukraine, admiring beautiful squares in small East Slovak cities and continued on to Romania.

It was overwhelming. I had visited many of the cities and regions we passed by before, but that was just after the fall

of communism some 20 years ago. What I was witnessing now was a social, economic and political miracle. The changes can only be compared with the record years in western Europe between 1945 and 1970. But while the recovery in western Europe was dependent on the US, eastern Europe has risen on account of the EU's own power.

The political consequences for the whole union are underrated; they aren't even included in calculations of the EU's future. But the growing prosperity in Katowice, Presov and Prague might turn out to be as important as the collapse in Athens and Madrid. This ought to be a source of optimism and confidence.

Reports from Paris, Brussels and Berlin about new crisis meetings to save the euro kept on coming during our journey. Now Spain was faltering. But during warm evenings on the square in Presov, the crisis felt both distant and embedded in another course of events. It was like I needed to transport myself to the geographical outskirts of the Union, in order to see the full picture.

The European obscurity has become paralysing. Who understands the direction in which politics is going, where the EU is heading, who would like to have what? Nobody even knows what next week will bring. Only one thing is evident: the one-eyed doctrine of austerity is driving the



The changing European landscape: Prague (top), unlike western cities which were helped by the US after the war, has grown on account of the EU's power. Madrid (centre) is likely to face economic hardship because of the euro crisis. While Athens (bottom) is dealing with the harsh consequences of extreme austerity measures.

monetary union to collapse. The politics of the matter seem to be submerged in a dream where the crisis can be isolated to a few countries, where major institutional changes can be avoided. In other words: Spain, Greece and Italy are badly constructed – not the currency union itself.

The political scientist Andrew Moravcsik gave intellectual support to the dream of a status quo in an article in *Foreign Affairs* during the spring, suggesting that Europe should be able to use some sleight of hand and wobble through the crisis. The euro is certainly a daring venture, but it will survive if everyone finally adjusts and gets in line. Moravcsik is an old authority in the European debate and his conclusions were provokingly optimistic. He simply meant that the policy to combat the crisis had been successful. The only thing needed now was for Germany and other rich parts of Europe to listen to reason and proceed with a more expansive economic policy.

But roughly at the same time another authority, the economist Paul Krugman, drew a different conclusion. In a column in the *New York Times*, under the headline “Apocalypse Fairly Soon”, Krugman wrote that a breakdown of the monetary union could arrive quickly and brutally. The emergency measures, according to Krugman, were nothing but a monumental failure.

For a long while Krugman's pessimism has felt more motivated than Moravcsik's belief in the future. But the strongest feeling of all has been that of widespread insecurity. Is that surprising? All the important political standpoints and decisions are taken behind closed doors. Not even the differences between Merkel's and Hollande's fundamental views of the European project are clear to the public. The euro crisis leads inevitably to the question of Europe and democracy.

Who can still avoid thinking of the prelude to the outbreak of the war in 1914? Nobody understood the point of a war, nobody wanted it, but nobody managed to leave national prestige behind in order to prevent it. A similar pattern has returned in the game about the euro. Every time the

European Parliament and the European Commission put forward a policy proposal suggesting common responsibility – euro-bonds for example – the heads of governments stop them. Privileged countries such as Germany, Finland and Sweden look after their interests in conservative self-deception. They are driving the continent – and themselves – towards the abyss.

Our summer journey developed into a European pilgrimage. We explored the outskirts of the big regions that historian Timothy Snyder has called Europe's "Bloodlands" or "Killing fields": the geographical centre of Nazi and communist genocides where twelve million human beings were killed between 1933 and 1944.

We descended cautiously into the cellar beneath the KGB's old headquarters in Vilnius. The prison cells, exercise yards and interrogation rooms are meticulously preserved. The padded cell for torture would give anyone nightmares. Our 22-year old daughter felt sick when she

detected traces of deadly bullets in the concrete walls of the execution room. She returned quickly into daylight.

We wandered through the concentration camp in Majdanek a few days later, now surrounded by Lublin's expanding

Growing prosperity in Katowice and Prague might turn out to be just as important as the collapse of Athens

suburbs. We saw the gas chambers, the place of executions and the crematorium.

We were not alone. In recent years Auschwitz has developed into a political pilgrimage for thousands of Europeans,

notably school classes. The interest has increased to a point where the visitor now has to participate in four-hour-long tours. You can no longer stroll around on your own as in Majdanek. The symbol of the unification of Europe has not become a shining Statue of Liberty but its dark history.

Our journey became a reminder of the fact that the European project was not born in naïve euphoria but because of the fear of what the continent had brought about. When you see tourists flocking to empty synagogues in Prague, Krakow and other cities, you realise that a European self-consciousness – founded on historical gravity – is assuming a more definite shape. You become a European in Auschwitz.

But the euro crisis indicates that a slow growing conflict is coming to a head: the one about democracy. The EU has been tormented by an evident crisis of legitimacy for two decades. Since Denmark voted no to the Maastricht treaty in 1992,

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Powering a world in progress



Dark past: The concentration camp in Majdanek, outside Lublin in Poland, is a grim reminder of what Europe has been through in the past century.

the barest idea of alteration has provoked demands for new referendums. The “non and nee” in France and the Netherlands became the most upsetting.

The political elites have always regarded the demands for referendums as a curse. But they should interpret them as a breakthrough for the European project. Finally the people of Europe wanted to have a say in important, common matters. The commitment revealed that the political debate in Europe had become... European. It was no longer limited to the landscaped offices of the Eurocrats in Brussels or the governmental offices in the continent's major capitals. It was like the people impolitely invaded the closed conference rooms, rallying around an old battle cry: you cannot decide unless we are present. The people simply seemed to want to take their newly achieved EU-citizenship seriously.

But during the euro crisis the heads of the EU's governments have reacted by withdrawing into their shells more than

ever. The power has been concentrated in a succession of top-level summits. Debates, fights and decisive standpoints

Our journey became a reminder that the European project was not born in naïve euphoria

have been undertaken behind closed doors; the European Parliament and the European Commission have been neglected; the citizens have been shut out. The consequence? Uncertainty about the political direction has increased and the distrust between the heads of government and the citizens has grown. Nobody trusts anyone. Is it surprising that many are

tempted by nationalistic and Eurosceptic parties? During the euro crisis the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas warned of a possible supremacy of the bureaucracies. Habermas has instead requested a transfer of power from the European Council to the popularly elected European Parliament. It is difficult to see another way out of the present legitimacy crisis. That the most far-seeing proposals during the crisis have come from the Parliament and the Commission is no coincidence: a financial transaction tax, eurobonds, a more expansive fiscal policy. The Parliament's mission is to put the European citizens first – not the member states. That's what makes the difference.

Why do politicians, even many social democrats, seem to regard the basic principles of democracy as self-evident on the national level, but threatening on the European level? Anyone can understand the difficulties. But why this horror-stricken paralysis? Their main argument is that a European people have not yet appeared in

a common, political and public sphere – a so-called demos. Without such a demos, democracy is only a chimera.

The Swedish Social Democrat Carl Tham, previously a cabinet minister and ambassador, formulated the argument in an article this summer: “a living and democratic political union can only be created in a situation when the European people feel a strong sense of belonging and solidarity with each other, when they think of themselves as part of a European people and have confidence in the political institutions. If it is suitable or reasonable then it can be discussed – but in any case it is obviously a long way off”.

But isn't this very common conclusion built on a misconception? It is highly doubtful that a “strong sense of belonging and solidarity” existed in the different nation states when the major democratic breakthroughs occurred in the beginning of the 20th century. “Confidence in the political institutions” certainly did not exist, and there was no widespread political and public sphere.

On the contrary. In the colossal book, *The Rise of American Democracy* by historian Sean Wilentz, you can see how democracy and demos grew in a mutual

process. Without democratic institutions, no democratic people will appear – and vice versa.

Beneath the hostility to a pan-European democracy, an old aristocratic thought can be found: the people are not yet ready for the responsibility that comes with democracy.

Four years ago, the British political scientist Simon Hix published a polemical book with the long title *What's Wrong with the European Union and How to Fix It*. He identified a historical turning point. Now, the EU needs to take an important leap: from a machinery of negotiations aiming to achieve political consensus, to an arena for democratic conflict and competition. The demands for referendums and the waves of mistrust revealed that the people no longer accepted the old culture. Therefore, Hix argued, it is time for the institutions to change in a mutual process between democracy and demos. With his precise reform proposals, possible within the boundaries given by the Lisbon treaty, the book has a permanent importance.

Hix referred to the fact that the EU is heading towards more and more fiscal redistribution but that such a development cannot achieve legitimacy without

transparent, democratic decisions. That was a farsighted projection. Today we know that the survival of the euro requires reduced economic inequalities between the members of the currency union. A fiscal union, possibly with the right to tax the European people, cannot be accepted without the democratic potential to exact responsibility on election day.

A debate about the deceit of intellectuals began a year ago: where were they when the European project was about to implode? Many of the contributions to the debate were published on the impressive site, Eurozine. But the absence of an outspoken debate and explicit standpoints from Europe's politicians is in reality more alarming.

Who can now understand what a social democratic policy for Europe could look like? The silence has strengthened the feeling of obscurity, paralysis and distrust.

So it was elevating to read an editorial by Gerhard Schröder in the *International Herald Tribune* this spring. At last an influential politician who first saw the connection between the euro crisis and the question of democracy, and the proposed reforms in the spirit of Simon Hix. Schröder summed it up in three points:

Many nations, one flag: the citizens of 27 member states can share a common vision and future within the EU.



- The European Commission must be developed into a government elected by the European Parliament.
- The European Council – the heads of governments – must abandon power and be transformed into an upper chamber with a similar role to the Bundesrat in Germany.
- The power of the European Parliament must be expanded. In the future we should have pan-European party lists where the top candidate is also the candidate for the presidency of the European Commission.

One doesn't have to agree with all of Schröder's proposals. But he is suggesting a direction towards a possible European democracy. This can, of course, be criticised as an attempt to impose democracy "from above" – but it can also be regarded as an acknowledgement of the challenge posed by Europe's citizens during the last 20 years.

It is no longer possible to hide from the question about what a European democracy will look like. Sure, it will be mobile and messy with different languages and different historical experiences. But who

suggests that democracy is supposed to be simple and predictable?

The square in Krakow is one of the most magnificent on the continent. The

It is no longer possible to hide from the question about what a European democracy will look like



cafés serve Polish beer. In the bell tower of the cathedral, the passing of time is marked by a man with a trumpet. History throws long shadows.

It is a good spot to observe Europe. Here you can reflect on the political miracle, the new prosperity and civilised democracy.

Many Europeans in the west feared chaos when the dictatorships of the east fell. They were wrong. People proved to be sensible. Here too. That should instil hope and confidence. But only 30 minutes by car from the square you will find the foremost reminder of the fear of Europe's darkness that brought about the European project – the concentration camps Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Democracy must always be widened. It will be thrust back as soon as you settle down in comfort. In the autumn of 1940, when the situation in Europe was at its darkest, the Swedish feminist and author Elin Wägner compared ideals to bicycle lights: They don't light up until you pedal forwards.

The social democratic mission in Europe in the autumn of 2012 can easily be summarised by Wägner's metaphor and two words: democratise and politicise. ■

Per Wirtén is a Swedish author and journalist.

The square in Krakow, Poland, (bottom) where history throws long shadows: Yet nearby in Auschwitz (top) one finds grim reminders of Europe's darkness, that eventually led to the formation of the European project.

A beginner's guide to EU democracy

You might take it for granted – but your right to vote in Europe has been hard won. And the battle is still going on. Our editor-in-chief **Eric Sundström** picks out some important democratic buzzwords and concepts to help you understand the background to the ballot box.

Spinelli

You've heard the name before, right? The main building of the European Parliament – opposite Place du Luxembourg where you drink beer when you're in Brussels – is named after Altiero Spinelli, an Italian political theorist who became both a member of the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Ventotene Manifesto

Think you need to do more than be an MEP to name the whole place? Italian fascists imprisoned Spinelli during the second world war on the island of Ventotene, where he wrote a manifesto called *Towards a Free and United Europe*. This, kids, was before the internet and decent prison conditions. Spinelli wrote the manifesto on cigarette paper before it was smuggled to the mainland in a tin with a fake bottom. The ideas were spread around different resistance groups. They soon became the starting point of the modern European movement.

ECOSY

Gathers socialist and social democratic youth and student movements in Europe. Since its foundation in 1992, ECOSY has been a vanguard for pro-European thinking, cross-border campaigns, eventful summer camps and great parties (if it's not fun, it's not ECOSY). It's a boot camp for many progressive politicians (and one or two editors-in-chief too – including me).

Crocodile Club

Named after the Au Crocodile restaurant in Strasbourg where Spinelli gathered other pro-European MEPs. Instrumental when the idea of “a treaty to establish a European Union” gained pace in the early 1980s. The spirit of the club lives on through the rather elitist “Spinelli Group” which tries to reinvigorate the struggle for a more democratic and federal EU. Socialist and ex-president of the European Commission Jacques Delors is one of its key-members.

Renaissance for Europe

An initiative by the thinktank FEPS with Jean-Jaurès Foundation, Italianeuropei and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. The idea is to find a “common progressive vision” as 200 out of 330 million Europeans in the eurozone go to the polls in France, Italy and Germany in 2012–13. The first conference was held in Paris right before Hollande's victory. One down, two to go – and then we'll start building a more social and democratic Europe again!?

Hix-scenario

What progressives end up describing in any late night wine-fuelled discussions about how the EU can become more democratic. Original source? Simon Hix's book *What's Wrong With The European Union and How To Fix It*, where Hix describes a pan-European campaign for the position of president of the European Commission between PES-candidate Margot Wallström and

José Manuel Barroso. Could it come true in 2014?

Shaping a Vision

A 120-page long publication for progressive and pro-European nerds, written by the aforementioned Simon Hix and Urs Lesse. Describes the history of the Party of European Socialists (PES) from 1957 to 2002. Yes, you'll find it as a PDF on the internet but no, there is no sequel with post-2002 developments yet.

Eurozine

Network of Europe's cultural journals and a web-magazine where you'll find a wide range of articles from its partner journals in one of Europe's major languages. Supplementary reading to Fresh Thinking!

PES-congress

Held, confusingly, every two and a half years – when there is an election to the European Parliament and midterm. It's the great get-together for the progressive European family. The next one is being held in Brussels in September. Bulgaria's Sergei Stanishev will be confirmed as the 10th President of PES since 1974 (they have all been men). Congress will decide on a “democratic and transparent process” that will select a PES-candidate to the position of President of the EU Commission in 2014. The “Hix-scenario” might be happening, after all ...

Greek Tragedy: Demonstrations in the birthplace of democracy

A professor of sociology from Athens said on the radio that in the centre of Athens 40,000 people basically live off trash. The crisis has hit those who were already the weakest – the poor and the migrants – especially hard. Athenians not directly affected by the crisis themselves are nevertheless confronted by it every day. They see people looking for food or begging for money. They see the homeless filling the streets in the evening.

Usually during the holiday season it's very quiet in the Greek capital. Not this year. There were three demonstrations in a single week before the summer break, in solidarity with the workers at a state-owned steel factory who have been on strike for nine months protesting the government's austerity programme. The demonstrations were organised by Greece's largest trade union and supported by various leftwing political groups and people of all ages.

All over Athens there are initiatives to help those in need, such as doctors working at the weekends collecting medicine to help those who have fallen out of the health care system, while others are joining together with friends to cook in public places for those who are hungry.

Photographs by **Jannis Keil**













It's not the internet, stupid!

Some might think the Pirate Party is simply about free downloads and social networking. But **Juli Zeh** explains how the fundamental principle of freedom underpins the party's politics and why it is appealing to a whole new generation of voters.

When 15 Pirate Party delegates joined the Berlin Senate last September the media worked itself into a frenzy. It was a "joke party" (Handelsblatt), a chaotic troupe (Tagesszeitung) without any real programme (ZEIT Magazine), whose followers are mainly interested in downloading music for free from the internet (Frankfurter Rundschau). The Pirates' success can only be explained as a protest vote (Die Welt).

But all that this shows is a massive lack of understanding as is so often with a generation gap. Such misunderstandings begin when one group can't recognise what is important to another.

The media cited the Green Party and how it was different from the Pirates. At least the Green Party had an agenda, they said, namely environmental policy, while the Pirates have nothing or at least nothing substantial, only something to do with the internet.

In truth, the internet itself isn't really a political issue. The Pirates always knew this but

The Pirate Party's fundamental goal is to return to the principle of respect for people

their critics didn't. What exactly is the so-called "internet policy" supposed to be? A bit of a dispute about copyright reform and the responsibility to use real names? That would be like the Green Party's only interests being separating your rubbish and compulsory recycling. Birgit Rydlewski, the Pirates' chairwoman for the North Rhine-Westphalia region, puts it like this: "Internet policy is just the key word which the old established parties believed was responsible for winning votes".

If you want to understand the Pirate Party's potential, then you need to appreciate first that "internet" means much more than just a technological aid, for which maybe a few laws need to be changed. It is the birthplace and home of the communication society and therefore the signal of the dawn of a new era, which one day will be seen as being as far-reaching as the invention of cars, trains and planes. An advance in mankind's endeavours to overcome space and time. Freedom is about breaking barriers. And here we have the point which is obviously so hard to get across: the Pirates aren't an internet



party, they are a freedom party. Their fundamental goal is to return to the principle of respect for people. In this context, the internet can be understood as an applied metaphor for a contemporary understanding of freedom. Freedom through equal opportunities, freedom through freedom of expression, freedom through common access to education and knowledge. Freedom through the erosion of hierarchies and authorities. Freedom through participation and pluralism and through rejecting linear thinking in favour of a comprehensive understanding of the world. As Berlin's Pirate Party delegate, Christopher Lauer, says: "We don't do politics for the internet, but for a society that has been changed by the internet".

"Freedom" isn't an issue for any other party right now. The FDP (Free Democratic Party), whose demise is happening simultaneously with the Pirates' ascent in popularity, mutated long ago into a party concerned only with economics, which is why bourgeois liberalism hasn't had a political home for some time. The Pirates are filling this gap. They are the only German party that treats "freedom" not only as an ideal or an economic matter but as a completely real, organisational principle.

That is the real parallel with the founding of the Green Party. "Freedom in the age of communication" is an issue that cuts across politics and society like

Today there isn't a serious party which isn't committed to social democracy, free market economics and environmental protection

"environmental protection in the age of industrialisation". It emerges in all political areas because it affects the fundamental constitution of society. How do we want to live? What are our values? What is our concept of mankind? Anyone looking for answers to questions like this isn't simply aiming at a political niche but at changes in economic, labour, education, family, social and security policies. Their demands won't be based on practical constraints, economic reasons or other solutions that have no alternative, but primarily on a fundamental conviction.

Social democracy, conservatism and liberalism were issues that cut across politics and society and led to parties being founded. But these concepts have lost their ability to connect with people. Today there isn't a serious party which isn't committed to social democracy, free market economics and environmental protection. For the parties behind these ideas, it means mission accomplished. But institutions don't simply go away because they've achieved their goals. They carry on existing but they've lost the sex appeal they once had when they fought for their convictions. A new subject, however, brings new people of conviction. The Pirates don't need to do anything except concentrate on their subject "freedom in the 21st century". It can be broken down into a political programme which might give them a good chance in the next parliamentary elections.

Flat rates for public transport, a minimum wage, legalisation of drugs, proper separation of church and state, a return to the principle of free education, civil rights and liberties even while combatting terrorism – all of these are claims which directly result from a humanist-shaped understanding of freedom already partly implemented in the Pirate Party's local and national programmes.

But it will get exciting when the Pirates discover those who currently have no political home. In Germany, there are some 2.5 million self-employed people. Artists, freelance programmers, hairdressers are all part of this group. And 40% of

all working people are in atypical employment and in a life situation which has nothing to do with the nine-to-five job. And there are new family models too, from patchwork families to gay parents.

These new freelance working patterns and modern domestic arrangements of an emerging section of society are not being served well. This new generation falls through the net of healthcare and pension insurance which was largely set up for permanent employees or businesses. While lack of childcare is a well known issue it is still unresolved – and flexible working arrangements still seem a long way off.

This is where the generation gap ignites. While younger people set the parameters between work and leisure time, job and family, office and living space, in a completely new way, older politicians in particular can only see self-inflicted chaos (CDU) or an expression of distress (SPD) in other people's desire to lead a free lifestyle. It seems unthinkable to them that a self-employed person could consciously chose this lifestyle of their own free will, that they value their freedom despite the fact that it makes life more complicated and insecure. Accordingly, the arrogant and unrealistic answer is that every working person should go back to employment within the scope of national insurance. Which of the established parties is really keen to think about a real reform of tax laws or of the broken national insurance systems? The preferred way of acting is to carry on as if nothing has changed, and by doing so they give the Pirates a massive opportunity.

Anyone who concludes that the new party can't be taken seriously, underestimates the substantial content of their seemingly flippant attitude which is a protective wall against a political world divided up by experts, and which excludes the "normal citizen"

Which of the established parties is really keen to think about a real reform of tax laws or of the broken national insurance system?

in the name of efficiency and lack of alternatives. This is about liberation from the established rhetorical and procedural constraints of daily political business.

Without a doubt the Pirates have the resources to become Germany's new social-liberal party. For this to work out will mainly depend on how well they'll be able to manage to extract convincing political demands from their core subject. To start with they have considerable start-up capital because of their special expertise. Anyone who knows how Skype works has fewer problems imagining a work place at home. Anyone who knows about Liquid Feedback, won't spend a long time pondering how to open up new ways to involve citizens in the political process. And so on.

Lauer and Rydlewski have a relaxed outlook. The Pirates aren't careerists, they don't want to be elected at all costs, so there isn't any reason for them to be forced to change: "We have nothing to lose and that's our trump card".

Juli Zeh is a German lawyer and writer. Her publications include novels and non-fiction books. Diktatur der Demokraten (Dictatorship of the Democrats) will be published in October 2012.

A version of this text appeared in Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin.



Cowardice in the face of friends

Political disputes in Romania and Hungary are threatening democracy. The European political parties need to get involved, but what can they do? **Werner A Perger** examines a modern European problem.



The longer the financial crisis goes on feeding doubts about European integration, the greater the worry about the future of liberal democracy becomes. It won't just be the joint currency that will be damaged if the "European model", built on the welfare state, legal security and political freedom, is unable to withstand the persistent attacks of international speculation – the democratic substance of the continent will be at stake.

This insecurity is promoted by growing nationalist populism in many of the EU's member states, the increasing acceptance of racist views even in the middle ground, the growing readiness for violence on the fringe and violent right-wing extremism.

With this background, the current political disputes in Hungary and Romania have their own dynamic, one that could prove explosive for both the main European Conservative and Labour parties. These disputes have some common characteristics which throw up a few

urgent questions: Are domestic political disputes carried out according to European democratic rules? Does the majority, when it is in dispute with its opponents, respect the principles of a constitutional state? Do legal policy reforms help to remove political baggage or do they only serve to consolidate existing power relationships?

When it comes to answering these questions, international journalists and political analysts are more critical than the two European political parties. The parties assume that their counterparts in the disputes are acting in a proper way. This is plainly the case with Hungary's president Viktor Orbán.

Orbán styles himself as a culture-revolutionary national democrat and he is celebrated by some parties, especially the regional branches of Germany's CDU. Romania's president Victor Ponta on the other hand enjoys the support of European social democrats in his fight against the previous Conservative government.

What do the independent experts say? "All in all it's about the logic of the mutual escalation of polarised factions," says Edward Kanterian, the Romanian-German philosophy lecturer at the University of Kent, United Kingdom, in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* newspaper. The power struggles are a product of a broken culture that is unwilling to make compromises. It's about destroying the opposition: them or us, me or him.

Who can help? Swedish commentator and award-winning Europe expert

Richard Swartz says the problem in finding anyone who might assist lies in the fact that a party-political element plays an important role. Swartz says the international political parties close their eyes when it comes to the mistakes their national party friends make. It's cowardice in the face of a friend. "But this tactical solidarity is as cowardly as it is short-sighted."

The parties could, in collaboration with the EU, intervene and mediate in the disputes. The European political parties could begin by sending out prominent fact-finding groups, so that they can get a picture of what is going on. Carrying out such fact-finding missions would allow the international partners of the local parties involved in these disputes to get involved but with more authority and think about further steps and sanctions. It would also be worth sending a troika to the dispute zones, with an EC representative and a leading figure from each of the two parties, offering the right mix of threat and encouragement towards a reasonable solution. It is worth a try – and surely better than hasty declarations of solidarity. ■

Werner A Perger is an Austrian lawyer and journalist. He is an editor for German weekly Die Zeit. He writes for the political magazine Cicero and is co-author of Was wird aus der Demokratie? (What will happen to Democracy?) published by Leske and Budrich, 2000.



Open embrace: Francois Hollande's coherent and coordinated approach to Europe played a major part in his election victory.

How to solve Europe's existential crisis

Francois Hollande managed to successfully articulate the interdependency between France and Europe, with positive results, argues **Robert Ladrech**.

The French presidential and parliamentary campaign of 2012 was a refreshing change from the habit of national governments of “blaming Brussels” for their woes or unpopular policies. Instead, there was a positive use of the EU as a campaign issue; that is, a reference to the EU as a means to positively influence national policy developments. Hollande and the Parti Socialiste (known as the PS, the socialist party) put forward an alternative plan for the economic crisis, one that put an emphasis on economic stimulus as well as budgetary discipline.

The surprise of the past few months was that a European-wide solution was

being offered to compete with the existing plan, drawn up and led by the conservative majority of EU member states. Was this an isolated example, a peculiarly French exercise in asserting leadership at EU level? Or should it perhaps be seen as an invitation to join in, in order to make credible the support such an alternative has across Europe? To be sure, timing was important. Solutions were urgently being sought while the financial crisis threatened to contaminate the Eurozone as well as individual countries such as Greece and Ireland. Although Hollande's proposals were eventually supported by governments in dire straits like Italy – led by the

Success at the EU level would help domestic economic policy. In fact, the two are inextricably linked

“technocrat” Prime Minister Monti – and opposed by Germany, the need for

concerted action has not abated. In other words, there remains a pressing need to develop the Hollande proposals and then implement them. This takes time, which brings us right up to the 2014 European Parliament elections.

In the French example, presidential candidate Hollande proposed an EU-wide plan for the crisis that would also benefit the French economy. Success at the EU level would help domestic economic policy. In fact, the two are inextricably linked; French economic growth urgently needed a resolution to the EU-wide crisis. This recognition of the EU dimension in national domestic policy is rarely articulated by national politicians but the success of the French campaign signals that perhaps the current crisis can be turned into an opportunity for the Party of European Socialists (PES) and its member parties. In other words, employing the EU as a positive campaign issue could potentially benefit PES member parties in the 2014 elections. How can this be done?

First, a coordinated and concerted effort must be undertaken to portray the austerity-only solution, with its attendant domestic pain, as a rightwing plan, which

not only benefits banks but also robs national governments of the tools or means by which to adequately manage their social as well as economic responsibilities. Here the French election would suggest this strategy could be effective.

It must be stressed that these European elections are meaningful, significant and even historic

Second, an effort must be made to present an alternative (derived from the Hollande proposals) that appears credible to voters because it is supported by a range of national and international figures – not just politicians but also high-profile members of society. It is also imperative that only two or three policy proposals are

emphasised, both to sell it effectively to voters but also to more easily defend them from conservative opponents. Importantly, it must be stressed that the alternative proposal is being pushed simultaneously in all other member states, and here a co-ordinating function for the PES is crucial. For purposes of campaigning and the ease of cross-national communication, only two or three policy proposals should be highlighted (ie, not a long “to do” list). This could include economic growth examples, for instance infrastructure projects, Euro-bonds for financing projects and debt relief, and realistic terms of debt repayment, terms that don’t kill the patient in order to heal him.

Third, more than ever, it must be stressed that these European elections are meaningful, significant and even historic. Without getting into the complexity of the Lisbon treaty’s new provisions for Europe’s Parliament’s assertiveness in the EU inter-institutional relationship, getting the point across that the European Parliament is more influential and that these elections will have a direct bearing on the choice of the next Commission president, is paramount. Though the number of centre-left

Common purpose: The PES, with Sergei Stanishev (below) as its president, could coordinate its members to achieve success on a European and domestic level.





Parliamentary democracy: The main political voice in the European parliament in Brussels needs to be reflected in the European council.

national executives in member states is a minority now, by summer 2014 there will have been elections in Germany, Italy and other member states. The message that a strong social democratic group can act as a check on Conservative economic policy at the European level is one of the singular points that a campaign co-ordinated by the PES can and must accomplish.

Fourth, the PES has a role to play in the co-ordination of the EP election campaigns, because national parties by themselves would find it difficult to mobilise public figures from across the European spectrum as well as co-ordinate campaign communication. A positive example, which must be built upon, was the visit by British Labour Party leader Ed Miliband hosted by President Hollande. Together they pledged to push forward an economic agenda that stressed responsible budgets as well as growth initiatives. These cross-party meetings help to lay the foundation for a cross-national campaign communication strategy for the EP elections. In fact, the more these leaders mention that their parties belong to a family of like-minded

parties that can work together in the European Parliament, the more the idea that there can be a positive aspect to the EU for domestic problem-solving will be enhanced.

Finally, it is instructive to compare the present situation and the next couple of years leading up to the elections with the 1999 elections. Then the centre-left was dominant in the 15 EU member states, with social democratic prime ministers in 11 of them, including, for the first time, simultaneously in the UK, France and Germany. Going into the 1999 European elections however, there was not a pan-European crisis to force party leaders to engage the EU as a means to overcoming domestic problems. Instead, we witnessed “third ways” and other national directions. In other words, having a large majority of social democratic-led governments did not translate into a co-ordinated social democratic policy for the EU.

Today, however, the present crisis can only be overcome by exactly such a co-ordinated plan, one that recognises more than ever the connection between

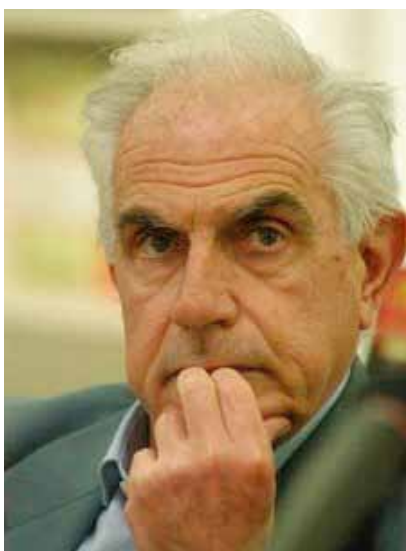
effective action at the EU level and positive results at the domestic level. Making explicit this link from a position of cross-national partisan strength rather than dependency and weakness – which plays into the hands of extreme nationalists and Europhobes – is the task in which the PES has a critical role. The stakes could not be higher. We are not just witnessing another periodic economic downturn or prolonged recession across Europe, but an existential crisis of the European project itself.

It pays to remember exactly what the benefits of the EU have been in terms of peace and security – without which the European model of society would not have been constructed – when we see the rise and influence of far-right parties from Scandinavia to southern Europe arguing for exclusion rather than inclusion in society. ■

Robert Ladrech is Professor of European Politics at Keele University, UK. He specialises in the impact of the European Union on domestic politics (Europeanisation).

On peoples, populisms and parties

The PES has a historical duty to establish a European people, says **Mario Tronti**, and European socialism needs to make political use of the current crisis.



When talking about Europe, it is correct to refer to populisms in the plural. Populism, in the singular, risks becoming a catch-all concept, creating confusion rather than understanding. The question we should ask ourselves is not what populism is, but what is meant by “people”. Then we should ask what is meant by “party”. The Party of European Socialists needs to identify its “people”.

“People” has two meanings: “people” of a nation, and “people” in society in the sense of class struggle. The concept of “people” is firstly a reality that is present in history as a living subjectivity in politics and in society. Populisms demote it to the form of the individual people and to the practice of anti-politics: a crime against the people, the culprit of which

is capitalism. The people need to be subtracted from populisms and for that a party is needed – a party of the people.

In today’s crisis-hit Europe we can see the existence of these two worlds: the peoples who are the object rather than the subject of the European political policies and the executives of the economic and financial institutions.

Technocratic government is not just that of Monti’s Italy, it is that of the EU and the European Central Bank. The national political governments are the administration, which – as de Gaulle said – will follow. Two separate worlds, the people and the technocrats in power.

These are separate worlds but not opposites. And this is the extent of the situation. Contrasts would, in fact, shed light on the actual development of the fundamental factors of the crisis. Conflict reveals the truth about the reality and then about the agreements. Capitalism believed it could grow faster by sweeping class conflict under the carpet, but by so doing quickly headed into its greatest crisis since 1929. It is necessary to have this contraposition of the people and the elites emerge to give this a political form and an organised structure.

The political use of the crisis is an art that the labour movement has applied in its best moments and that the left of today has completely forgotten. The

obligation of subservience to the objective parameters of balancing the budget, the claimed sovereignty of the markets substituted for the sovereignty of the states, the attribution of blame to the people for the debt of their governments, the demonisation of the social market economy: all of this is nothing other than the ideological apparatus that neo-liberal globalisation has imposed upon the European structure. This is precisely what is to be denounced, unmasked and overturned.

The PES has a historical duty to establish a European people. Just because peoples are established does not mean they are spontaneous creations of history. It has been said that men make history, albeit in well-determined conditions.

The determined conditions of today make the crisis an opportunity for grafting a genuine decision. Political Europe is exactly this, a sovereignty of the people for a European federal state. It is once again time to put culture against civilisation. The culture of socialism against the civilisation of capitalism. The question on European socialism’s agenda is: What is to be done? ■

Mario Tronti is an Italian philosopher.



Vivien A Schmidt

is Jean Monnet Chair of European Integration, Professor of International Relations and Political Science, and Founding Director of the Center for the Study of Europe at Boston University. Among her publications are *Debating Political Identity and Legitimacy in the European* (2010), *Democracy in Europe* (2006), *Public Discourse and Welfare State Reform* (2005), *Policy Change and Discourse in Europe* (2005). Schmidt has held appointments as professor at the University of Massachusetts/Boston and was a visiting professor at various European institutions.

How to tackle a multinational democratic deficit

Europe is facing unprecedented political and economic challenges. Piotr Buras talks to US political analyst Vivien A Schmidt about how to restore the faith of several different nations in a joint democratic process and what progressives need to do to get the best out of political union.

It was the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville who wrote one of the most famous books on democracy in America. Some think that such a cultural and geographical distance is necessary to be able to analyse complex political issues without prejudice or emotion. There aren't many aspects of European political culture that are more complex than the EU's democratic deficit and how to improve it. So it's probably not by chance that the most in-depth analysis of this problem was written by a US scholar. Vivien A Schmidt divides her time between Boston and Paris. "It is my second home," she says as we discuss European issues in her Parisian flat.

A German columnist, applauding a ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court which strengthened the rights of the parliament in the process of the euro crisis resolution, recently wrote that, "democracy is more important than the euro". Is there a risk of rescuing the euro at the expense of democracy?

A whole range of measures have been taken to save the euro. In fact, many

of them represent encroachments on national parliamentary democracy that would be acceptable only if the EU was seen as more democratic. But this is clearly not the case. There are real problems for democratic governance when member states' leaders sit in a room in Brussels and take decisions about fiscal consolidation without parliamentary debate. Decisions by government leaders alone do not provide sufficient democratic legitimisation. Today's excessive intergovernmentalism unbalances the power of both the supranational and national institutions. This is not what a political union should look like. It is rather a rigid rules-based technocratic approach to governance which is not democratic.

The report written by the Van Rompuy group and presented at June's European Council outlining the way to a more consolidated Eurozone is very scant on the issue of democracy. What would be the right way to go? One of the ideas circulating in the debate is to create a

new chamber of the European Parliament consisting of national MPs.

I am not sure if a new chamber is needed. It would complicate the legislative process in the EU as we would have, in fact, three chambers: the EP, the new representation of the national parliament – and the Council of the EU. I would suggest a different solution. What you need to do is "politicise to legitimise". For the 2014 European elections the European People's Party (EPP) and the Party of European Socialists (PES) said they want to nominate their own candidates. So you will have primaries, general election campaigns and debates with national publics in all member states. It would force the national parties to agree on a platform and would create a division between left and right. The candidate of the majority party should be then necessarily nominated as the head of the Commission. That would politicise this institution in an unprecedented way. The majority party would have enough legitimacy to say: we run our own policy. For example, if the Conservatives win, they might envisage

less rapid deficit reduction while keeping growth-producing investment for the future, such as in education, research, infrastructure, and renewables out of the calculation of the deficit. This kind of injection of politics into the technocratic process of the EU integration has been missing so far. Politicising the EU more generally could help recapture the popular imagination and make the EU seem recognisably important.

Would institutional reforms be enough to restore the legitimacy of the EU? The silent majority has supported the EU not because it had much influence upon the policies adopted by Brussels but because the outcomes of these policies were generally good. It seems as if this period has come to an inevitable end.

There are three different ways to think about democratic legitimacy. Input legitimacy means the representation of the citizens through the Council or European Parliament. It is about political participation and how the people can bring their ideas in. On the other hand you have output legitimacy which is about policy outcomes you mentioned. But I argue that there is also a third dimension which I call throughput. It is about the efficacy of governance processes, as well as their access, openness, transparency and accountability. If the public perceives the procedures as biased, the policy is delegitimised regardless of how good or bad their outcomes are. This is the current situation in Greece or Spain. The reforms conducted in the Eurozone only aggravate the situation. You need to make throughput also legitimate.

Is that possible without an overhaul of the EU institutional structure and the creation of an European super-state?

Most urgent is to open up the new procedures in EU fiscal policy to debate with the European Parliament. At the moment the fiscal rules are decided by the European Commission which looks at national accounts and follows

very narrow criteria demanded by the European Council. These numerical targets are not only economically wrong but also very problematic in terms of democracy. They seem to believe that by narrowing the flexibility and limiting discretion one can avoid raising democratic issues. The opposite is true. An idea would be to conduct – on a yearly basis – debates on the economic and fiscal policy between the council and the parliament in the way national governments do. It should not be Germany or Merkozy imposing numerical targets forever. It must be a matter of a political decision-making process.

The politicisation of European integration requires “more EU”.

But that is what the people in the member states do not want. Do you think that injecting more politics can paradoxically lead to a setback in the integration process?

We are at a critical juncture and one has to move forward. Like it or not, Europe has already been politicised. Look at the Netherlands and Geert Wilders, or France with Marine Le Pen, at Greece with the extremists on the right and left. The politicisation of the EU has increasingly led to the rise of extremes. We need to find a response to these developments at the national level. It is not just about representative institutions in the traditional sense. You also have to provide greater access to social movements and interest groups which need to have ways of voicing their opinions. We should go beyond the right to submit petitions which the Commission can decide whether it wants to take into account or not. National governments should encourage their citizens to organise themselves as interest groups and social movements to lobby Brussels. Such pluralist democracy is also an indispensable part of throughput legitimacy.

Progressives face a democratic dilemma. Mitterrand learned in the

1980s that “you can not create socialism in one country”. To carry out progressive ideas you need to think and act in terms of the whole of Europe. But voters on the left are sceptical about openness, integration, immigration or cosmopolitanism.

Social democrats have also not been very good on new ideas and new discourse on European integration. The crucial issue for progressives is: how to create greater market integration without destroying the welfare state? You could use the Lisbon treaty on “enhanced cooperation”, for example, to create labour migration or pension zones among countries with similar systems, say, in continental Europe with Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, maybe France. This would make it easier for workers to move from one country to another. It would have a major impact on unemployment and standard of life. Another idea: rather than having a directive which can destroy public services everywhere you could try to make it possible for public services to become more truly European through greater mobility among countries with strong public services. Phillipe Schmitter proposed many years ago to abolish the agricultural policy and substitute instead a European minimum income fund. Why don't we introduce VAT on cross-border transactions? If you do it together with the financial tax you are not just targeting the financial markets but have a strong argument: cross-border trade has promoted growth and prosperity across the EU and therefore it is right to tax it and use this money for policies to the benefit of the whole population. One has to exercise one's imagination about how to make the single market work better without going in a neoliberal direction.

Piotr Buras is a contributing editor for Fresh Thinking and journalist for Gazeta Wyborcza.

The EU must connect with the people if it is to survive

The euro crisis has put the EU's democratic principles in the spotlight. We asked some leading progressive politicians what institutional reform would strengthen the EU's democratic legitimacy and how our joint democracy could be improved.



Martin Schulz

President of the European Parliament

European integration is now over 55 years old. Many justifiably call it a unique success story. Many think this development is irreversible. Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel has repeatedly emphasised there is "no alternative" to the EU. I must contradict this. What we praise today as a model of success – democracy, reconciliation, understanding, solidarity and wealth – is under threat. And yes, there are already alternatives to the society we know on the horizon, and that troubles me. Fear, nationalism, racism, extremism – these developments are already visible today, when politicians or the media in our member states try to damage each others' reputations or when citizens from partner countries are humiliated or experience racist abuse, or when those who are apparently bigger and stronger think they are above those who are smaller. Why are we witnessing such developments now? Europe has been in crisis for nearly four years. This crisis creates hardship and poverty makes people an easy target for those who want to simplify things. Authoritarian structures seemingly deliver quicker results than democratic processes and make it easy to implement scapegoat strategies. "It's the others, not us, who are responsible for the problems here." Then bad, foreign countries can be blamed. Thirty percent of the electorate in Greece and France voted recently for radical rightwing or leftwing parties. Not everyone who voted for these parties is a communist or a fascist. But hard times are a boom time for populist ideas. It's easy for populists to blame certain things. I could simply cite the youth unemployment rate of 50% in some countries – and that's with the best-educated generation we have ever had. If we can't explain why we have €750 billion available to bail out the banks but nothing for the younger generation, then we don't need any populist politicians. The youth will simply turn away from us anyway. My

worry is that if we can't offer young people a positive future because wealth is unevenly distributed, then we'll find ourselves with a social imbalance. That's why we need measures to distribute the money more fairly, for example by introducing the financial transaction tax. Does Europe have a problem with democracy? The union is as strong or as weak as its member states allow it to be. The European Parliament and the Commission do indeed have strong and efficient instruments available to them. The question for the member states' governments is if and how they are involved. Their answers so far have been sobering. The longer the crisis continues, the more the leaders point to apparent solutions in a parliament-free space. I call this a kind of "summitisation", where decisions are made in isolation and the people's national and European representatives simply have to go along with them. It shouldn't come as a surprise that citizens will turn away from this kind of Europe. What are the options for the future? Every member state is too small to survive in global competition. We need more Europe, but only where joint action gives added value, such as for environmental protection and trade policies, or in the fight against international crime. I have great hopes for the Lisbon treaty reforms. It states that the next president of the European Commission will be elected by taking into consideration the results of the European elections. I expect that in 2014 the big European parties will have a joint pan-European top candidate for the Commission's presidential elections. Then there will be competition between the politicians and their programmes. This hasn't been the case so far in European elections and it should also increase the profile of our Parliament. It still isn't too late to have a unified, cooperative, democratically responsible Europe consisting of states which don't have to give up their national identities.

**Elena Valenciano**

Deputy Secretary
General of the Partido
Socialista Obrero
Espanol (PSOE)

**Christiane Taubira**

Minister of Justice,
France

Democracy does not only consist of European parliamentary elections every five years. Citizens should see their preferences reflected in the decisions made by the EU. For example, if citizens prefer policies of growth and not austerity, as shown by the Eurobarometer data, it is not reasonable that the Union takes other measures. Therefore the mechanism of joint decisions between Parliament (where representatives directly elected by the citizens sit) and the European Council (where the states are represented) should be strengthened. Moreover, democracy improves when the mechanisms of accountability are reinforced. In that regard, citizens should be able to demand explanations from the Commission if it develops policies that are not in full concordance with the citizens' expectations.

It would be very important to join together the figure of the President of the Commission and the President of the Council in order to align the two engines of European integration: the one that follows a communitarian logic and the one that follows an intergovernmental one. This change would allow citizens to place their democratic mandate on a single figure who could be accountable and that is a key element of the contract between the rulers and the ruled.

This single figure should be elected by the representatives of the citizens in the European Parliament and should come from the ideological majority in the chamber. The day when all groups go to the elections with pan-European lists and single candidates to preside over the Union, will be the day the democratic deficit will be considerably reduced. For that reason, the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers Party) is supporting the strengthening of the Party of European Socialists and will work to present a list and a single candidate for the 2014 elections.

Democracy, French philosopher Alain said, is the rule of law. True, if that means the common rules that guarantee personal and public freedoms. As Europeans it is worth reminding ourselves of the passion we have put into building democratic institutions. First regarding the idea of equality. Equality for everyone and everyone together, thereby challenging the social orders of the nobility and clergy, even if today's Europe is able to reconcile democratic republics with constitutional monarchies. With citizenship in abundance, Europe invented the individual and then individualism. Democracy continued to gain ground in the political and the social order. Yet it dialectically produced the seeds of dispute within its bosom. For it also guarantees the freedom of expression of its enemies. Intolerance, new forms of discrimination and exclusion, fear of the unknown and rejection of outsiders are now at work within European societies. What is more, it is by way of basic democratic structures, the political parties, that these hostile and deadly reactions that we long believed to be of marginal importance are now being expressed. The democratic institutions are solid.

But are they still vibrant enough to embrace the necessary debates on otherness in societies which have become plural, accommodating so many cultures in so many landscapes? We need to give substance to the European democratic project, to reawaken the utopia from the audacious time when Europe sought to define the human being, to declare him equal in everything, to proclaim his freedom and dignity, conceiving of the institutions to ensure this remained the case, signing conventions of commitment to the cause, setting up courts of justice to punish violations. The poet Edouard Glissant invites us to an "insurrection of the imaginary". What if we dared?



What's making Europe talk

Romania's Prime Minister, the social democrat Victor Ponta, has led his party since 2010. However some of his recent controversial actions, including an attempt to impeach the country's president, Traian Basescu, have been called into question by political commentators.

We have collected together what some of Europe's leading newspapers had to say on the subject.

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If European Social Democrats entrench themselves behind the fact that Ponta didn't violate the constitution, they misconceive the actual problem: he ignored its spirit. Conservatives have to understand that the impeachment vote against Basescu is not a putsch, not a coup, not even a power trip. It just revealed that, in an EU-member state, the institutions up to the constitutional court do not have control over the parties. What Romania now needs from the EU is a clear, honest and balanced judgment.

Frankfurter Rundschau, Germany

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First Hungary, now Romania, and perhaps Bulgaria next: one eastern European country after another seems to be sliding backwards from liberal democracy and towards what many observers now call “Putinisation”. A few years ago, the question “can there be a soft dictatorship inside the EU?” would have been dismissed as an abstruse hypothetical for students of law and political theory. Now it is an urgent challenge for the EC, which appeared to assume that once inside the club of European liberal democracies, nobody could imagine anything better.

The Guardian, UK

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There are worries in the European Union about the future of Romanian democracy, because the real danger is to lose the balance between the weight of the different institutions. [...] Otherwise the current regime will be crippling for an economy that is hoping to regain vitality. Victor Ponta and Crin Antonescu must regain the electorate [...] How will they act seriously if they start so poorly?

Sette Giorni, Italy

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Mr Ponta undermines what should be most sacred to Europe: democracy. His behaviour puts back on the table the issue of the effectiveness of the enlargement of the EU in 2007 – too fast, too easy. Europe is a large market, which is one of its strengths. But by only being this, it loses more of its significance every day. Tolerating the actions of Mr Orban and Mr Ponta weakens it a little more still.

Le Monde, France

Romania is not a well liked country. Its poverty, its truculent politicians (to say the least), its social backwardness, its corruption, its Roma, etc. cause it to be marginalised. It is the outcast of Europe. This is why, on first analysis, it is damaging to see the European authorities now getting involved with their Romanian buddies. [...] But there are objective reasons for this intervention. Europe got involved when, in Bucharest, the Constitutional Court denounced the attacks of Ponta's government against President Basescu as "virulent and unprecedented". Brussels expects the states of the union to respect the rule of law. [...] The Union is not just a business deal; it is also founded on its values. And these values are a minimum standard that the states must agree to meet. Obviously this cannot be said for all states, such as those run by Victor Ponta and Viktor Orban.

Le Soir, Belgium

Victor Ponta's belligerent statements [...] do not indicate a change of attitude, despite the promises he made in Brussels. That is why they require the EU's strong reprimand, despite its diminished mechanisms to put pressure on those partners that deviate from the democratic path.

El Pais, Spain

The way the European party families apply double standards is impossible to bear. When Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban pushed through his scandalous laws, the European Socialists spoke about dictatorship, the Greens and the Liberals even called to exclude Hungary from the European Union. The Conservatives played Orban down ad nauseam. In the case of Ponta it's completely the other way round.

Der Standard, Austria

Some years ago, when Brussels was still strong, none of the prime ministers of the EU would have gone so far as Orban or Ponta have already done. [...] Today's crisis of the Eurozone is exceptional not only because talking about the collapse of the EU ceased to be a taboo. It also became acceptable to question the very sense of being together. The EU, like every ill organism, concentrates on fighting the illness – which means curing the public finances and strengthening the monetary union. The defence of democracy and other community values is stepping back. Europe still works but it is weak. This weakness is a god given opportunity for centralist powers in each EU member state.

Gazeta Wyborcza, Poland

It is disappointing that the Romanian government's political friends have been so quiet. The protests against developments in Romania have come from the EPP, the party that brings together the European Christian Democrats and Conservatives. Barely a word of criticism – from the Socialists and the Liberals – was uttered before the EU Commission delivered its harsh reviews [...] When a country is challenging the basis of democracy, the political blinkers must be taken off.

Dagens Nyheter, Sweden

FRESH THINKING BOOKS

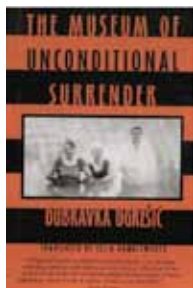
In every issue of Fresh Thinking, we make a few suggestions of what to read, watch and listen to, that relates to the subject of the current issue. This time our subject is rather broad: democracy in general and its current challenges in the EU in particular. Our editor-in-chief Eric Sundström notes with regret that there are no tribute songs to Jürgen “European public sphere” Habermas, but he did pick out a few little democratic gems at the crossroads where democracy and culture meet.

Let’s start with novels that we all should read or re-read at some point: **Aldous Huxley’s** *Brave New World*, **William Golding’s** *Lord of the Flies* – as well as **George Orwell’s** *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* – are all true classics that deal with different aspects of human nature, what the future might bring and democracy’s enemies such as Big Brother-societies and totalitarianism.



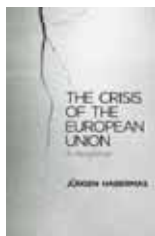
We also suggest you add the diaries of **Victor Klemperer** to your reading list (three volumes stretching from 1933–59). His detailed description of the small and creeping mechanisms – both in rhetoric and policy – that created Nazi Germany should never be forgotten.

In the huge pile of novels dealing with democracy’s struggle in Europe, we would also like to highlight **Milan Kundera’s** *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (set in the Prague spring of 1968); **Dubravka Ugresic**



The Museum of Unconditional Surrender (dealing with the war and breakup of Yugoslavia, memory and loss); and **Anna Seghers’** *The Seventh Cross* (about an escape from a camp in Nazi Germany, originally published in 1942).

Turning to the world of academia, **Jürgen Habermas**, one of the great intellectuals of our time, cannot be held back from publishing his thoughts on today’s Europe. *The Crisis of the European Union* was published earlier this year. *What’s Wrong With the European Union and How To Fix It* by **Simon Hix**, mentioned



by Per Wirtén in our cover story, is very solution-oriented and has already become a classic.

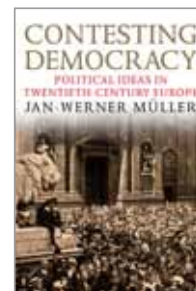


During the last couple of years we have been blessed with quite a large amount of well-written books about the state of democracy. **John Keane’s** *The Life and Death of Democracy* aims to present the full history and he suggests that the cradle of democracy can be traced beyond Greece and all the way to Syria-Mesopotamia (around 2500 BC).



Colin Crouch has been dubbed the father of the concept “Post-Democracy” and has written a book with that title. More recently, Crouch’s book *The Strange Non-Death of Neo-Liberalism* was praised by the Guardian: “With ‘lobbying’ and other Unspeak (‘campaigning’, ‘privatisation’, ‘consumer welfare’), vocabulary draws a veil over the corporate corruption of democratic politics, which is one of the themes of this highly approachable and illuminating argument in political economy”.

The Crises of Democratic Capitalism, a shorter read written by **Wolfgang Streeck**, can be found in New Left Review (September–October 2011). In *What’s Left of the Left: Democrats and Social Democrats in Challenging Times*, edited by **James E. Cronin**, **George W. Ross** and **James Shoch**, a group of distinguished scholars from both Europe and the US address the challenges of the centre-left.



If you’d like to catch your breath and rethink Europe’s recent history, we would like to recommend *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* by **Jan-Werner Müller**. According to the New Statesman it is a

“fine study of the impact of mass democracy on European political cultures”.

Simon Carswell's *Anglo Republic: Inside the Bank That Broke Ireland* focuses on Europe's third largest island, but explains European-wide problems: how a bank can convince a state to take on its debt, as well as the cosy relationship between bankers and politicians.

As we know, Francois Hollande's gender-equal government is an exception to the rule – men are still dominating our democratic institutions. But in December an anthology called *Breaking Male Dominance in Old Democracies*, edited by **Drude Dahlerup**, will be released. The book will cover comparative research from eight countries on the political participation of women, but also other marginalised groups. Might very well become a must for progressives.

FRESH THINKING MOVIES

Moving on to movies and democracy, it would be an insult to cinematic history not to start with *The Great Dictator* – written, directed and produced by **Charlie Chaplin** (who, needless to say, also plays the leading part as the Jewish barber in what is also Chaplin's first talking picture). Released in dire times in the autumn of 1940, Chaplin's obvious condemnation of Hitler and Nazism, Mussolini and fascism – as well as anti-Semitism – was initially controversial but the film quickly became popular with the public as the war intensified. In his memoirs, however, Chaplin states that he could not have done a comedy about Nazism had he known about the Holocaust.



A few really successful films in recent years have also dealt with the broader theme of democracy in different ways. Speaking of the

entry of marginalised groups into democratic institutions, the biographical film *Milk* portrays the journey of gay rights activist Harvey Milk, up to his election into public office as openly gay. Directed by **Gus Van Sant** and with Sean Penn in the leading role, the film received eight Academy Award nominations.

The end of communism and the reunification of Germany has also inspired filmmakers. *The Lives of Others* is



Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's debut and won him an Academy Award for best foreign language film. The story

evolves around how a Stasi officer begins to empathise with the playwright he is supposed to spy on. *Goodbye Lenin!*, also set in East Berlin, is also worth seeing if you happen to have missed it but it's more of a tragicomedy.

A few films dealing with the transition from dictatorship to democracy in Africa also deserve a mention. *The Last King of Scotland* tells the (fictional) story of how a Scottish doctor becomes the personal physician to Uganda's dictator Idi Amin. Forest Whitaker plays Amin – one of the most-deserved Academy Awards in recent years.

FRESH THINKING MUSIC

Where to start? In this field there are a few classics that make up an amazing playlist. Here goes:

People Have the Power by **Patti Smith** (inspired by a Diego Rivera mural at the Detroit Institute of Arts). *Rockin' in the Free World* by **Neil Young** (a critique of George H W Bush's administration). *Get Up, Stand Up* by **Bob Marley** (written on the plane as Marley left Haiti, appalled by the poverty among Haitians). *The*

Revolution Will Not Be Televised by **Gil Scott-Heron** (includes references to



Nixon, Agnew, the Vietnam War, the Watts riots).

Nelson Mandela by **The Special AKA** (written by

Jerry Dammers who was inspired by an anti-apartheid concert in London).

Strange Fruit by **Billie Holiday** (based on a poem about lynching in the American South). *Talkin' 'bout a revolution* by **Tracy Chapman** (became popular again last year during the Tunisian revolution).

God Save the Queen by the **Sex Pistols**



(an explicit tirade about a non-democratic monarchy). And **John Lennon's** *Imagine*, of course. The list could go on forever...

There are also a few albums if you have an interest in the labour movement's struggle for freedom and democracy.

Billy Bragg's *The Internationale* includes his version of **Eugène Pottier's** song with same name, as well as *The Red Flag, This Land is Your Land* by **Woody Guthrie**, *Joe Hill* by **Phil Ochs**, and *There is Power in a Union*. **Bruce Springsteen's** album *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions* is built upon spirited versions of workers' songs made popular by **Pete Seeger**.

Finally, we urge you to do what artists like **Björk, Madonna, Patti Smith** and **Yoko Ono** have already done: support the Russian feminist punk-rock collective **Pussy Riot**.



Riot.

Just as we went to press t h r e e

women from **Pussy Riot** were sentenced for “hooliganism motivated by religious hatred” in Moscow. Two years in prison for a few minutes of music.

The EU's big eastern neighbour just doesn't get that democracy is the only way to rock'n'roll.

MISCELLANY

Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.

– *Franklin D. Roosevelt,*
US president 1933–1945

Democracy don't rule the world. You'd better get that in your head. This world is ruled by violence. But I guess that's better left unsaid.

– *Bob Dylan,*
Union Sundown, 1983

Democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.

– *Winston Churchill,*
British Prime Minister, writer, 1874–1965

Democracy is a device that ensures we shall be governed no better than we deserve.

– *George Bernard Shaw,*
writer, 1856–1950

Burn down the disco. Hang the blessed DJ. Because the music that they constantly play. It says nothing to me about my life.

– *The Smiths,*
Panic, 1986

Men write many fine and plausible arguments in support of monarchy, but the fact remains that where every man has a voice, brutal laws are impossible.

– *Mark Twain, writer, 1835–1910*

In Italy, for 30 years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love; they had 500 years of democracy and peace – and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.

– *Orson Welles,*
as Harry Lime in the film The Third Man, 1949

Television has made dictatorship impossible but democracy unbearable.

– *Shimon Peres,*
president of Israel

The whole dream of democracy is to raise the proletariat to the level of bourgeois stupidity.

– *Gustave Flaubert,*
writer, 1821–1880

Democracy is not just the right to vote, it is the right to live in dignity.

– *Naomi Klein,*
contemporary writer, journalist

Without democracy there is no freedom. Violence, no matter who uses it, is always reactionary.

– *Friedrich Ebert,*
SPD, the first democratically elected president of Germany, 1871–1925

Democracy is the process by which people choose the man who'll get the blame.

– *Bertrand Russell,*
philosopher, 1872–1970

From the wars against disorder, from the sirens night and day, from the fires of the homeless, from the ashes of the gay: Democracy is coming to the USA.

– *Leonard Cohen,*
Democracy, 1992



FRESH THINKING

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