

Foreword

The publisher of this volume – the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) – is best known for its scientific publications; nevertheless, the authors whose contributions follow this foreword have not confined themselves to a simple description and analysis of different areas of European policy. They work every day for a better Europe, and they propose ways of getting us from here to there.

This year will be marked by a number of significant political milestones. Question marks hang over the nature of Europe, the future of the European Union (EU) and the political and economic development of our continent, and the debate on Brexit and the lack of a common asylum and migration policy are just some of the things that will shape the answers to these questions. Political pundits can talk of nothing but the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament and the appointment of a new European Commission which will ensue, filling the airwaves with phrases such as ‘a watershed election’ and ‘our last chance’, and in many cases claiming that it is finally time to make ‘social Europe’ a reality. Tangible and proactive commitment to the task of shaping the scientific, political and cultural future of Europe is what many politicians, scientists, journalists and trade unionists are calling for, and rightly so. A glance at projections by pollsters reveals a noticeable increase in the share of parties opposed to the European process of integrating a ‘Europe of sovereign states’, and virtually all the manifestos of populist parties – at both ends of the political spectrum – call (with varying degrees of vehemence) for the EU to be stripped of many of its powers, for a return to the borders of the past, and for an exit from the euro or even from the EU. The trade unions stand in opposition to this retrogressive trend and to the instinct to put up the shutters and stay within the narrow borders of the nation state, and instead call for a future in which Europe’s different peoples coexist in a spirit of humanitarian solidarity that ignores lines on maps; after all, the advancement of this unique coming together of free and sovereign states has been backed by Europe’s trade unions ever since the start of European unification. A great many people, both within Europe’s borders and without, still regard ‘Project Europe’ as an extremely attractive proposition, and Europe is still inextricably linked in their minds with the promise of well-being, a basic level of social security and a life of freedom and peace. The contributions in the remainder of this volume discuss what needs to be done to put Europe in a position to continue delivering on this promise.

The first contribution (by Reinhard Kuhlmann and myself) highlights failings in the current debate on Europe’s future, and the very title proposes a way to remedy them – by saying ‘Yes to more Europe - now!’ If we want to stop Europe falling apart, and in particular if we want it to grow, we must avoid focusing solely on stand-alone issues,

regardless of how important they no doubt are. We need to ask questions about Europe's future which get right down to brass tacks, and we need to respond to these questions with conviction. The democratic structure of the European Union's Member States is one of the main pillars on which this Europe of ours is built, and yet certain political circles are making energetic moves towards authoritarianism. Compliance with the basic principles of democracy must be scrutinised more closely than ever before if we are to prevent these principles from falling by the wayside.

Workplace democracy and democratisation of the economy are factors which play an integral role in a society's journey to democracy, and they have formed the focus of Wolfgang Kowalsky's research work for decades. His contribution to this volume describes a number of political and legislative initiatives in great detail, and reveals very plainly that it is up to Europe's trade unions to campaign for greater transparency and participation in corporate governance, since very little in the way of proactive effort can be expected from political parties in this area.

The financial and economic crisis which hit Europe from late 2008 onwards pushed many of its citizens to the brink of catastrophe. It has even been said – with some justification – that the crisis cost some individuals their lives, since upheavals in certain Member States' healthcare systems made it difficult or even impossible for the sick to have access to medication or treatment. Matthieu Méaulle's contribution tackles the question of what needs to be done to ensure that every citizen of the EU benefits from its economic recovery; we must not content ourselves with mere soundbites about healthy financial markets, or with simply calling for an equitable tax policy. We must take action, and we must stem the rising flood of income and wealth inequality.

Juliane Bir provides a well-structured overview of what dialogue with the social partners has achieved in the past and a sobering insight into the current and likely future fate of this initially promising tool; her contribution closes with an appeal to the protagonists to be mindful of their political responsibilities. Agreements which are freely concluded on the basis of social dialogue and which may ultimately acquire legislative force are a valuable opportunity for Europeans to participate democratically in policy-making, and the need for employers and the European Commission to harness this opportunity is more pressing than ever before.

Positioned after these meditations on Europe, my conclusion contains a number of thoughts on the trade unions and a call for them to take action. Strong and assertive trade unions were (and in many European countries still are) the most reliable representatives of working people, but they need to evolve in order to ensure that this remains the case. Their level of enthusiasm for building Europe at policy level will determine whether or not they play a meaningful role in shaping its future, since trade unions too are not immune from the tendency to retreat into national antagonisms and turn away from Europe. Populist propaganda against the bureaucratic behemoth of Brussels is also gaining an audience among trade union members, and anti-EU parties often hold a surprising appeal among working people. This represents a serious challenge for trade unions which wish to take a firmly pro-European line when exercising their power to shape policies.

I would like to end by expressing my warm thanks to all of the authors who have contributed to this volume, and not only for their diligence in meeting deadlines. Work on this publication triggered an internal debate and reminded us of the question which motivates all of us who believe in the shared vision of a democratic Europe and a Europe of solidarity, peace and human rights; ‘What can we do to help Europe grow?’

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Peter Scherrer
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