



*Thematic contribution  
for the Congress of  
Villeurbanne The Europe we  
want*

*This contribution was prepared by a working group of the Socialist Party section of Paris 11th - Léon Blum from the exchanges and reflections engaged with the twin sections of the SPD Berlin - Pankow and the PSOE Seville - Triana Los Remedios. It was unanimously adopted at the section general assembly on Wednesday 21 October 2020.*

*In this contribution, we have chosen to focus on a few of the themes that have emerged in recent months, rather than listing, in an exhaustive manner, all the aspects for which we are calling for a change of direction in Europe.*

### **A Europe of health**

Since the activation of the European Commission's crisis mechanism to deal with the coronavirus crisis at the end of January 2020, the presentation of the recovery plan on April 23, followed by the European Council of July 21, which set the amount and terms, weeks and months have passed without the European Union being able to keep up with the seriousness of the events. Under pressure from the Council (and a few States in particular), the adoption of the recovery plan is constantly being postponed even though its implementation is urgent. Moreover, our older fellow citizens are paying a heavy price in this health crisis: European public policies must not forget them.

What we wish :

- that health becomes a competence of the Union. It must make it one of its priorities, without this calling into question decentralized day-to-day management. Health is a public good that is an integral part of our European social model. A European health policy must therefore enable all citizens to have access to quality care;
- pool the Union's resources for the supply/transport of protective equipment, vaccines (when appropriate) ;
- define a European industrial strategy to avoid dependence on third countries, starting with basic necessities (drugs, medical devices, etc.). In the longer term, a broader reflection should be undertaken on the necessary relocation of entire sections of the productive apparatus;
- Establish a coordinated management of the closure/reopening of borders within the Schengen area, according to objective criteria set at the European level ;
- To increase the exchange of experiences and good practices between European health care personnel in the treatment of Covid-19 ;
- to encourage European solidarity in the care of patients and the transfer of health care personnel, as needed;
- create a biomedical research and development agency.

## A Europe that protects workers

Until the start of the pandemic, the economies of the member states seemed to be finally recovering from the financial crisis of 2008, with unemployment rates back to pre-crisis levels. However, unemployment rates remained very high in some countries, particularly in France (8.1% in February 2020) and Spain (13.6% in February 2020).

%). In ten member states, the unemployment rate for 25-year-olds (excluding students) exceeded the 15% threshold in 2019.

Unfortunately, economic and social indicators are expected to deteriorate sharply due to the pandemic that affects all member states. Together with the health crisis, the threat of a return of mass unemployment in the most affected countries such as Spain or Italy could strongly penalize citizens and widen the gap between Northern and Southern countries.

Other indicators show great social disparities in Europe. This is particularly the case for the minimum wage. 21 of the 27 member states provide for it for all employees, but its amount varies: it is €2,142 in Luxembourg and €312 in Bulgaria (gross amount). Even when these wages are compared to the cost of living, there is still a real divide between Western and Eastern countries, where people have lower purchasing power on average, despite a lower cost of living.

Finally, the number of Europeans facing poverty remains particularly high. This is the case in Romania with 23.5% of people below the poverty line in 2018 (60% of median income) or in Greece (22.9% in 2019). In total, in 2018, more than 73 million Europeans will be living below the poverty line, including 40 million in "extreme poverty".

Measures to minimize the impact of the crisis on companies are moving in the right direction. However, subsidies, loans and tax exemptions granted by the States must be accompanied by guarantees: since this is public money, companies (especially trans-European ones) must commit themselves not to take advantage of the social crisis to reduce working conditions in Europe.

The European Commissioner for Employment and Social Rights, Socialist Nicolas SCHMIT, has launched a reflection on minimum wages in Europe. The Socialist Party must be the driving force behind this project with a clear ambition: to end poverty and improve the lives of all Europeans, especially women who suffer the full brunt of the wage gap. One solution would be to create a minimum wage in each Member State based on the median wage of the country. Some experts advocate that it should be 60 percent of the median wage, which would be an important step forward for workers' rights. Let's not forget that many of the workers who are currently underpaid have allowed our societies to continue to function at the height of the health crisis. Our economic model claims to be a social market economy and cannot accommodate the existence of the working poor. The same is true for seniors and we call for the creation of a European minimum old-age pension, also indexed to the median wage.

Moreover, the necessary ecological transition will lead to a massive loss of jobs in certain sectors. Lifelong vocational training is one of the keys to a smooth and coordinated reconversion of the most affected workers. However, the economic crisis must not be used as a pretext to delay the ecological transition.

## A Europe of values

European integration began at the end of the Second World War. Over the decades, despite institutional changes, enlargements and political alternation, some major principles have remained unchanged, such as absolute respect for the rule of law. It turns out that for years, several countries, including Hungary and Poland, have been meticulously undermining the foundations of our democracies, in particular by calling into question the independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press or the separation of powers, by bullying the opposition or the rights of minorities.

We call on the European institutions to show the same intransigence with countries with serious democratic deficits as with those with budget deficits. In this context, and independently of the actions taken by the European Commission against Poland and by the European Parliament against Hungary (for violation of fundamental values), we believe that socialist leaders and MEPs must show the utmost firmness. The granting of European funds conditional on the respect of the rule of law seems to be a relevant solution in the short term. Yielding to blackmail from those countries that threaten to block the recovery plan and the budget would be an admission of weakness and would set a dangerous precedent. The Union is long overdue in confronting these leaders with their contradictions: to defend the European Union and its values while cashing in on subsidies paid out as part of solidarity between member states. In the medium term, these countries will have to make a choice: being a member of the Union and benefiting from the single market means accepting the rules of the game. It will also be necessary to reconsider the unanimity rule, which in the end amounts to giving each Member State a right of veto and condemns the Council to paralysis when violations of the rule of law are found in a country and sanctions are proposed against it.

We also want to strengthen our ties with the social democratic parties in these countries, through the Party of European Socialists or twinning arrangements. These peoples belong to the European family and we wish to maintain strong links with all those who share this conviction.

## A united Europe

The lack of European solidarity at the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, the lack of coordination between Member States, the bitter budgetary negotiations between the most affected countries and the so-called "frugal" countries, only served to accentuate the division of Europeans, already palpable in many countries. For a more united Europe, it is important to foster the emergence of a sense of belonging and solidarity among citizens and therefore to pursue all initiatives in this direction: encouraging the discovery of other European countries from a very early age, facilitating the mobility of high school students/apprentices/students, but also of the working population and senior citizens, promoting the learning of at least two foreign languages, encouraging the media to devote part of their programming to European issues, better informing the population of Member States of their rights as European citizens, extending the right of citizen initiative, putting an end to the geo-blocking of digital platforms within the Union, etc.

In the area of international relations, we believe it is important to strengthen the competences of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, a role assumed by our comrade Josep Borrell, to create the position of European Minister of Foreign Affairs, with the resources and legitimacy to speak on behalf of the 27. We propose to challenge the unanimity rule in the Council and to favour the principle of qualified majority or reverse qualified majority <sup>i</sup>.

In a world in turmoil, marked by a disengagement of the United States from international organizations and agreements and the rise of new state and non-state actors, Europe must use its power of influence to advocate peaceful conflict resolution, multilateralism and recourse to international law.

Moreover, it seems to us that Europe is the relevant level to impose stricter regulations on the GAFAM, particularly in the fight against online hate on social networks.

This diplomatic component must be complemented by a common defense strategy. It must be noted that NATO is currently at an impasse. Moreover, recent years have shown the countries of the East that the United States will not be the eternal guarantor of their security. The vocation of European defense is not to replace NATO, but to compensate for its shortcomings, notably by strengthening the Union's independence from its partners in the transatlantic alliance.

We want a Europe whose voice carries in the world, thanks to a truly European army, which already exists in an embryonic form: the Eurocorps. The time has come to give impetus to this little-known organization, which brings together five Member States (France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain and soon Poland), and five Associate States. Each country would thus contribute men and weapons to this army with a political strategy and an adapted chain of command. This structure would be a deterrent force and would make it possible to pool counter-terrorism resources and exchange intelligence. Its mobilization would be subject to a vote by the directly elected European Parliament.

<sup>1</sup>A Commission Recommendation shall be deemed to be adopted unless the Council, acting by qualified majority, decides to reject it within a given period of time after its adoption by the Commission.

#### **Lists of the first signatories :**

Jérôme Meyer, section secretary for Paris 11th arrondissement, deputy mayor of the 11th arrondissement, Emma Rafowicz, deputy secretary, deputy mayor of the 11th arrondissement, Gilles Gony, treasurer, Kévin Cordier, deputy treasurer, Lucie Solem, head of twinning and European partnerships, deputy mayor of the 11th arrondissement, Michel Puzelat, head of training, Stéphane Martinet, Hervé Brun, etc.

François Vauglin, Mayor of the 11th arrondissement, Patrick Bloche, honorary deputy, deputy mayor of Paris, Dominique Kielemoës, Paris councilor, Florent Hubert, regional councilor, deputy mayor of the 11th arrondissement, Rosalie Lamin, <sup>1st deputy mayor of the 11th arrondissement,</sup> Luc Lebon, deputy mayor of the 11th arrondissement, Joséphine Lanfranchi, deputy mayor of the 11th arrondissement, Jean-Pierre Corsia, deputy mayor of the 11th arrondissement, Nadine Blanchard, borough councilor of the 11th arrondissement.

François Comet, Federal Secretary for Europe, Borough Councillor of the 6th arrondissement, Kévin Havet, Section Secretary Paris 18e, Deputy Mayor of the 18th arrondissement