Looking back over the last few years one sees a variety of crises that marked the period of the Juncker Commission. When he took office in 2014 large swaths of the EU were in the midst of the greatest economic and financial crisis for decades. Then came the refugee crisis, Brexit and the trade conflict with the USA. Whether the next few years see progress towards a solidarity-based Europe depends in the first place substantially upon whether the new European political leadership finds answers to the most pressing challenges ahead.

Today, the European Union stands as a cypher for the dark side of globalization. Decision-makers had no answers in troubled times when all across Europe – for the most distinct reasons – there has been a general anxiety among all sectors of society. In everyday reality the EU equals, for too many people, competitive pressure, de-localisations, (re)distribution conflicts, wage dumping and untrammeled market forces to the detriment of working people.

Individual benefits of the single market, such as being able to live and work where one wants, hardly play any role in the everyday lives of most people or play a role in such a way that they become the decisive argument for actively approving European unification. What Europe needs is more participation, more transparency and more of a say for all its citizens.

The decision-making processes at EU level must be democratized by strengthening the European Parliament, especially through the right to initiate in the legislative process and the election of commissioners. But decision-making processes within parliament itself must also become more transparent. The way decisions are reached must revert to proper parliamentary scrutiny rather than being taken in back rooms behind closed doors. As long as it alone sets the decisive political signals in core areas with legislative initiatives, the commission must take on the obligation to be more responsive to initiatives from parliamentarians, that is, representatives elected by millions of European women and men.

If the EU is to serve as a model for the future, that depends quite specifically on whether it can succeed in resolving the urgent issue of sustainable economic development. The most pressing problem of the next few years and decades, climate change, is not negotiable but manageable. This will release transformative processes that will arouse fears among people. Managing this transformation must, therefore, be done socially, ecologically and democratically.

**Socio-ecological conversion of industry**

Only a social-ecological conversion of industry opens new growth potential and ensures the long-term sustainability of employment. In line with this, any European industrial strategy must be an ecological modernization strategy aimed towards energy efficiency, reduction in resource usage and sustainable mobility. The whole of Europe requires a mobilization of forces in favor of expanding renewable fuels and innovative environmental technologies. In particular, efficient use of resources and eco-sustainability, in material and energy, harbor prospects for productivity growth. This requires the private sector to switch its investments more decisively towards ecological conversion and reconstruction. Other priorities should be education, training and research and development, along with infrastructure.

A further priority in any socio-ecological policy approach must be to ensure and expand decent work in manufacturing, given the pending structural changes in industries that will be particularly affected by decarbonization. Here, all too often in recent years, there were empty claims and ambitious goals, and all too rarely discussion about which measures agreed at EU level might best achieve these goals.

If one is to create a social union then one must guarantee that fundamental social rights take priority over economic freedoms. Competition and market ideologies have for too long pushed into the background the ‘social’ in the social market economy that, on paper, constitutes the EU since the Lisbon Treaty. The EU already disposes of a considerable *acquis* of fundamental social rights. This is not enough, however, to take proper account of and apply these fundamental rights. The
reason for this is, along with the social deficit that was there at the birth of the EU, the ‘crisis policy’ of the last few years and the linked deregulation of member states’ welfare systems as regards EU fundamental rights. Be that as it may, a legacy of Jean-Claude Juncker is that, after many wasted years, social policy is at least back on the European agenda. But to speak of a ‘revival of social Europe’ would be to go too far.

In particular, the EU will only be able to become an inclusive growth and prosperity model if it comes with strong collective bargaining systems. In recent years the trend has been more and more towards a policy of state intervention in wages policy by disregarding free collective bargaining and destabilizing entire bargaining systems. A large share of that approach came from the EU, primarily via the mechanism of economic governance. Here, the new commission has to change course.

Create space for codetermination

Respecting the collective and individual rights of working men and women can also be demonstrated by democratizing the economy. It is a living democracy in which workers are willing and able to recognize their rights to contribute and take part. When we talk about a comprehensive Europeanization of codetermination as the interest group for working women and men at all levels, in all places of work and on issues that are of cross-border relevance, then we must be guaranteed that national and European rights to information, consultation and codetermination are secure and strengthened. The commission must refrain from taking any initiatives - for example in the area of company law - that weaken the position of working women and men legally or practically within their company and unilaterally advantage employers. is really required is initiatives to create space and scope for codetermination rights. Legally binding improvements, for example, should be made to the European Works Council directive by the prevention of any ban on circumvention. What’s more, a European framework directive is required, setting high standards for information and consultation as well as ambitious minimum standards for company-level codetermination.

International trade and global value-added chains ensure in many a place decent jobs and prosperity. But these are now primarily threatened by protectionism and (social) dumping. Untrammeled free trade is not, however, the answer. Trade must serve human well-being and is not an end in itself. Trade requires rules that protect worker interests and set social and ecological frameworks. The key thing above all is that the EU must create mechanisms for respecting collective and individual labor rights. Model chapters on employee rights are available for the commission to fall back upon in negotiations – be it bilateral, plurilateral or multilateral.

Multinational businesses bear a particular responsibility. Many of them with HQs in the EU account for three quarters of entire world trade through their value-added chains. A legal regulation on due diligence is of central importance here. The Conflict Minerals Regulation has set the precedence for further sectors. For the textiles sector, preparatory work on a comparable regulation is already far advanced. The new commission must build upon this work and set out a draft version of a robust regulation.

Past years have shown that ad hoc crisis management is highly dangerous for the stability of national economies and the political community. It remains the case that the advanced interplay of goods and financial markets requires more regulation within a political union. Draft reforms of Economic and Monetary Union that envisage elements of cross-border liability in the event of crises are very welcome. The Stability and Growth Pact must, like monetary policy, be geared towards the target of sustainable growth and a high rate of employment. European economic governance must put an end to the one-sided fixation with public deficits and accumulated debts and be given the political mandate to co-ordinate macroeconomic decisions as well as employment and social policies. That way, the eurozone, with an own-budget and under democratic control, could become the centerpiece of a more deeply integrated EU. Competition in cutting corporation tax must finally be brought to a halt. A uniform EU minimum level of taxation based on a common consolidated tax base and one that, via certain defined channels, allows for differing starting points in individual countries, can achieve this.

A radical change, of course, is now even more urgent than ever. And it can be done. Policies can be put together as described that pursue a solidarity-based renaissance of the EU. The European Commission plays the key role here. In the next few years, the issue will be persuading the ‘protector of the treaties’ not just to keep a watchful eye on the basic freedoms of the internal market but, rather, take on the task of forging a social Europe and, thereby, a Europe with a future.

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