

New Pact for Europe – Rebuilding trust through dialogue

Project description

Europe is currently facing multiple crises that are threatening the European project: the financial and economic crisis, the banking and sovereign debt crisis, the geopolitical crisis surrounding Ukraine and the relationship with Russia, the migration/refugee crisis, the potential ‘Brexit’ crisis and, arguably, a security and civil liberties crisis.

European responses to date have fallen short of matching the scope and speed of the multitude of challenges they aim to address, and the European Union currently seems incapable of moving forward. National agendas prevail and efforts to identify common interests, and thus common solutions to tackle these challenges together, appear to be taking a back seat. ‘Sticking plaster’ responses – often representing the lowest common denominator – have become the norm in the EU, instead of individually and collectively delivering lasting solutions that go beyond firefighting. Failure to reach a consensus on policy approaches in time, a tendency to resort to brinkmanship in negotiations on key issues and a predominant “what’s in it for me” attitude have undermined trust and led to deep divisions between member states, the EU and its citizens. Europe is faced with a crisis of meaning and identity, and a dangerous rift between member states.

Given the state of today’s Union, there is an urgent need to foster debate at all levels, exchanging views across the EU to provide insights into other countries’ interests and viewpoints. This could help member states and the Union as a whole to weather the crises and become proactive once more, going well beyond the lowest common denominator. In this sense, the crises are also a window of opportunity for Europe to find new common ground.

Building on the analysis and proposals elaborated in previous phases, in 2016-2017 the New Pact for Europe project will explore how the EU can better serve the interests of its member states and citizens, through a series of national and transnational debates on key policy challenges (the

migration/refugee crisis, internal and external security, as well as economic and social challenges). This will be done through discussions in National Reflection Groups created specifically for this purpose in ten EU countries (Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia) as well as through transnational exchanges between these groups.

The ultimate aim of this new phase of the NPE project is to elaborate - with the help of a European Reflection Group - the details of a wider 'package deal' to equip the EU with the tools it needs to meet the internal and external challenges it faces, while also taking into account the diverse interests of its member states and citizens. This package deal will contain solutions generated by connecting the discussions on the key policy challenges, and propose changes in the way the EU and its policies are defined to avoid similar fundamental crises in future.

The extensive work done so far in this project has prepared the ground for this next stage. Since it was first launched in 2013 by a group of European foundations, the NPE initiative has developed and discussed different strategic options and reform proposals for the EU's future at more than 80 events in 17 EU countries. The need for a new 'grand bargain' based on an ambitious but realistic package deal has become apparent from the reactions to the previous NPE reports. The ideas and recommendations included in the final report will be presented to key policy-makers in Brussels and the EU member states, and feed into the debate after French and German elections in 2017.

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