

CALL TO EUROPE VII: DEMOCRACY FIRST!

RE-WRITING THE RULES OF THE EU ECONOMY

By S.Ferroni



call to europe VII



FROM THE FEPS CONFERENCE CALL TO EUROPE VII: DEMOCRACY FIRST!

organized by **Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)**

On Thursday 29th June, the 7th edition of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) flagship conference “Call to Europe” took place at the Management Centre Europe in Brussels.

This conference was an opportunity to gather a great number of progressive stakeholders from different backgrounds to discuss contemporary socio-economic and-political issues affecting our society. Furthermore, considering the results of recent elections in some European Union member countries, great attention was paid on the crisis of socialist parties in order to analyse the roots and better this dramatic situation.

The Conference started with an introduction by the former Italian President Massimo D’Alema, who highlighted the event main keynotes and reported the challenges the progressive community must deal with, from the Trump’s election to the immigrant’s issue, from the Euro-scepticism to the right-wing populism and so on and so forth.

The introduction was followed by the main conference appointment, namely “Debate: Democracy First! Re Writing the Rules Of The Eu Economy” attended by Joseph Stiglitz (Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences - 2001) and Pierre Moscovici (European Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs).

The Conference continued with two different “Big Debates” in which took part four different groups, such as Politicians, Academics, Journalists and Civil Society representatives, who discussed on different topics related to the challenges for the Progressives.

During “Call to Europe” came in succession speeches by eminent personalities such as Maria Joao Rodrigues, Sergei Stanishev, Bruno Liebhaberg and Zita Gurmai.

What is FEPS?

FEPS is the only progressive think tank at the European level that fosters open, provocative and fresh debates to stimulate new thinking in Europe and in the Progressive movement.



In partnership with:



A new direction for a progressive Europe
Stand up for our future!

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Maria Joao Rodrigues elected new FEPS President

This 7th edition could be considered as a turning point in FEPS history since there has been the last Massimo D'Alema's official speech as FEPS President. The former Prime Minister of Italy chaired the think tank of the Progressives at European level over the last seven years. During his speech, he announced his successor as Maria Joao Rodrigues, S&D Group Vice-Chair elected by the FEPS council on Wednesday 28th June. The first time for a woman at such a position.



Massimo D'Alema,
former President of FEPS

**"I am very honoured as I've been working with FEPS since the beginning, both as an academic, policy maker or member of the European Parliament" [...] "We will continue the current research and we move to a new phase in order to address the major challenges ahead."
-Maria Joao Rodrigues.**

As soon as the new FEPS President was elected, the structure of the organization itself witnessed some important changes. In particular, it should be underlined the nomination as new President of the Scientific Council of Josep Borrell, former European Parliament President. A small "rEvolution" aimed to strengthen the academic relevance of this organization and its research network.

During her first speech as FEPS President, Maria Joao Rodrigues underlined that it is the time for the EU to become a political entity with strong cohesion and democracy, and not just a single market.

Referring to the 5 scenarios outlined by the commission in January, the Portuguese mentioned the necessity of a 6th scenario closer to European citizens:

"ensuring decent job and social protection, investing for a sustainable development, increasing convergence in the Eurozone, providing security but also protecting refugees, making a fairer multilateral system in cooperation with the rest of the world".



Maria Joao Rodrigues.
new President of FEPS

WHO is the New President elected?

Maria João Rodrigues (Lisbon, 1955), Former Minister of Portugal for Employment in the first government of prime minister Antonio Guterres (now UN general secretary), is currently vice-president for economic and social affairs of the S&D Group. She is a prominent academic specialised in EU affairs and a European politician. She is also a full professor at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and in the Lisbon University Institute.



DEBATE: RE-WRITING THE RULES OF EUROPEAN ECONOMY

The First part of the Conference was held by the Debate between the Nobel prize Joseph Stiglitz and the Commissioner Pierre Moscovici moderated by the Journalist Daniela Vincenti on the theme how to deal with the current socio-economic situation that western countries are facing.

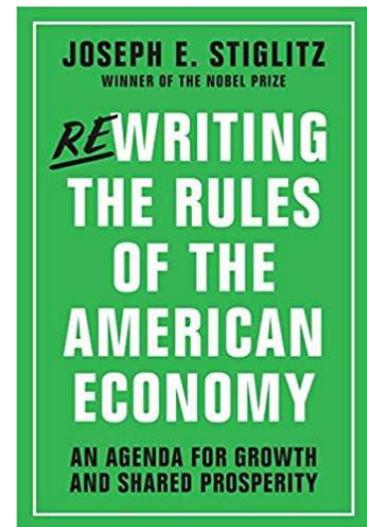
Making a sort of calque on his latest work “Re-writing the rules of American economy”, Stiglitz tried to compare economic situation in US and in Europe, finding possible solutions. The prominent professor said that the 2008 crisis showed the weaknesses of an unfair capitalism, an under regulated financial market, and what was wrong with the so-called new liberalism. Indeed, these strategies brought neither to more growth, nor to more stability, and they especially led to a wider inequality. Where these ideas were followed more strongly the outcomes were absolutely the worsts.

The economic model of the last 35 years based on free-market, liberalisation has not worked for most of the people in both Europe and United States of America.

Furthermore, the 2008 crisis instead of being the moment in which everybody recognized this, it turned out to be the moment in which the Progressives were blamed for their inadequate responses.

It is clear in both Europe and USA that the basics of requisites of a middle-class life are no longer accessible to a very large portion of the society and a key issue on this matter is “where is the role of the state in the economy and in the insurance individuals’ access to priorities like public education, healthcare and housing?”

"Broadly speaking", he said, "progresses have been made, but it is hard to understand if these measures have been implemented rapidly in order to limit the consequences. The damage of the crisis is going to be hard to repair, especially in Southern Europe. Youth unemployment is going to dramatically affect young people's trust in the government and in the society themselves".



Nowadays, the best reaction to this crisis would be re-writing new rules for the 21st century economy, not to go back to the seventies, but because current issues have deeply changed. For example, climate change wasn't an issue 25 years ago. Now, to deal with this, carbon taxes should be strengthened, in order to induce investments on renewable energy and sustainable market strategies. Another issue is how to encourage entrepreneurship regulating competition and so on.

"We need to re-write the rules of the economy for the new century in order to fight inequality."

After Stiglitz' speech took the floor the Commissioner Pierre Moscovici. Initially, the Commissioner focused the attention on the current situation of the Progressive movement around the Europe: "From the North to the South, from the West to the East the Progressives are in crisis" referring to the data related to the recent elections in several European countries, where socialist parties reached less than the 10% of the votes. However, Moscovici underlined the fact that the populist movements have lost their battles around Europe, and that it is time for the Eurozone and for the Left to get to a new step in their reflection on how to improve this situation. Speaking about "Re-writing the rules of the EU economy", the Commissioner replied to the American economist saying that the question was not how to rewrite the rules, but how to complete these rules. Once again he renewed his wish to create a European Ministry of Finance democratically controlled by the European Parliament itself. *"I would like a Minister of Finance boosting equity and fighting inequalities. Others want a person implementing technically automatic rules. More democracy, less technocracy. That's my motto."*



CONCLUSION:

On the whole, the FEPS conference Call to Europe has been a unique opportunity to gather and link all the best progressive ideas. A vivid exchange of good practice and successful stories. A meeting based on a constructive debate among international progressives from different background. A debate aimed to relaunch the progressive party, fight inequality and build a more meritocratic and human society, closer to citizen's priorities.

Considering a great series of factors, namely the Brexit, the Election of Donald Trump in America and Macron in France, the defeat of populist parties, the change of the FEPS leadership, the 7th Call to Europe could be considered as one of the most challenging and fundamental editions.

S&D Sec Gen Javier Moreno: "We must take to the streets & convince people of our ideas & programmes."

