

The Decline of Europe and the crisis of the Left

1. On September 9, 2024, Mario Draghi, presented his long-awaited report, requested by the EU Commission, on the state of the EU. In a report of about 400 pages, he made dire assessments about the state of the EU economies, explaining that the EU is far behind the US in productivity and in a number of sectors also behind China. According to his report, the EU is still basing its economy on industries that dominated the world economy 20 years ago, but has not been able to be part of the rise in new industries since then. Essentially Draghi was describing the further loss of ground in the context of the historical decline of the European powers and the risks of failing to face up to the challenges in the new and direct confrontation between the US and China.
2. His answer to the problems, was more neoliberal policies and more deregulation, combined with greater EU convergence especially in the banking sector and defence; and with expenditure to the level of 800 billion euros annually for the next 10 years to support private and public investments. This figure represented a massive 5% of the EU GDP, whereas at present the EU budget represents no more than 1% of the EU's GDP. This funding would be provided by common EU loans.
3. Draghi's report builds upon the Letta report ("Much more than a Market", April 2024) and aligns with the proposals by sections of the European establishment regarding the need for a multi-speed Europe – specifically the creation of a Euro-core through the enhanced cooperation among a select group of countries. Despite the extensive integration of the European economies, the ruling classes of individual countries have retained significant control over their banking systems strategic enterprises and fiscal policies, thus preventing the establishment of a truly continental capital. The EU is faced with a cumbersome and contradictory institutional framework, reflected in divergences on foreign policy, on defence, on migration, etc, leading to slow decision-making procedures or even partial paralysis. Despite the structural focus of Draghi's report, discussion naturally concentrated on the figure proposed by Draghi to finance his proposals.
4. The German government reacted within hours to reject it. Common funding for common European public and private investments and for common Research and Development, would mean that Germany, with a budget deficit of 1.9% and a public debt at 63% (i.e., very close to the Maastricht criteria which are considered as the corner stone of the Eurozone) would accept financing countries like France with a budget deficit of 5.3% and a public debt of 112.4% of GDP and rising, Italy with a budget deficit of 7.4% and a public debt of 142.4% (expected to rise to 148% by 2029) and so no and so forth. Common funding of common loans, *as a general rule*, is something that cannot be expected to happen because clashes with the "national" interests of different powers in the EU.
5. Germany, France and the other industrially developed countries of north Europe, find it easy to point the finger to the countries of southern Europe and impose brutal terms on them in the name of the common interests of the European "common home" (this was the expression used in

the not-so-distant past) but they refuse to sacrifice their national interests for the “common good”. German capitalism will not accept the destabilization of its own self for the sake of financing further “progress” of the EU edifice, particularly in a period of serious economic problems as will be shown further on. It will use such funding for its own interests, to strengthen its position at the expense of the rest of the EU countries (particularly the south), as it has been doing since the creation of the EU and especially the Eurozone (EZ).

6. On the other side, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron in a recent (October 2, 2024) [interview with Bloomberg](#) said the following:

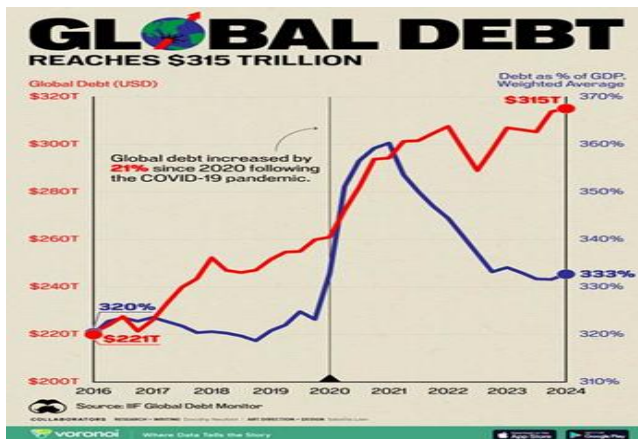
“The EU could die; we are on a verge of a very important moment... Our former model is over — we are over-regulating and under-investing. In the two to three years to come, if we follow our classical agenda, we will be out of the market.”

Macron is not as ambitious as Draghi. But he is equally pessimistic about the future.

7. A quick glance at major events that marked Europe in 2024 will show the further retreat of the EU in the global economy; a deepening political instability, largely linked to the further general rise of the Far Right; the weakening of the German-French axis which has always been the backbone of the EU and its decision making centre; the further decline of the parties of the Left; a retreat of the class struggles that had an upsurge in the course of 2022 and 2023.
8. The European powers are squeezed between the US and China due to the trade war that the US initiated and between the West and Russia on the war in Ukraine. In both occasions they are the main losers. From a strategic, long-term perspective they have had to stick to their alliance with the US, but this is costing them a lot. Some strategic corridors that wove together a greater Euro-Asian integration have, in fact, been severed (from Nord Stream to Sino-European railway connections). Germany’s economic strategy centred on exports to Asia and Chinese supply chains, is now called into question, starting with a recession and a restructuring that is impacting its productive core (notably the automotive sector).
9. In many countries, concern and dissent are growing over the erosion of social and democratic rights. Mechanisms of discipline, control, and oppression of social defiance are multiplying; the right to strike and demonstrate is under attack; stringent repression is being directed at pro-Palestine protests with widespread use of force and arrests. The support for the Israeli state in its genocide and ethnic cleansing in Gaza has fostered greater awareness and resentment toward European (and US) imperialist policies, particularly among young people. Movements opposing the ongoing process of “social militarization” across the continent are also developing, even if in sporadic, or subterranean forms. These are important factors impacting on consciousness, even though mobilizations sometimes adopt nationalist or neo-camp frameworks, which obscure the class character of the issues.
10. The situation for the European powers will become even more complicated in 2025, after the victory of Trump in the recent (5 November 2024) elections in the US. On a global level there is nothing positive that could come to the aid of the ailing European economies. On the contrary, the

international background, economically and geopolitically can only deepen the crisis of European capitalism, opening up the possibility of new conflicts in the EU, disruptions and rearrangements.

International Background



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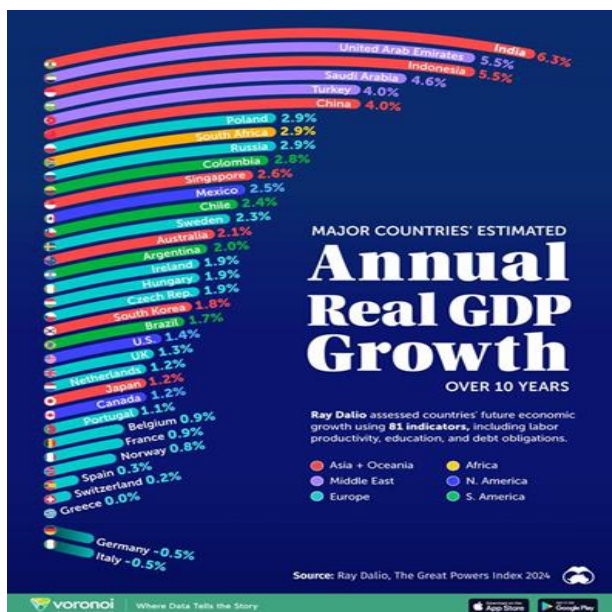
The Economy

11. In 2022 the perspectives for the world economy, among all the major economic and financial think tanks internationally, were very gloomy. There was near panic after the rise of inflation and the geopolitical earthquake caused by the war in Ukraine, and the main prediction by most economists was one of a hard landing for the global economy. This did not materialize, despite the rise in interest rates from the region of 0% to around 5% for the EU and more than 5% for the US. In this period there was a

historical bullish rise in the US stock exchange and internationally – entirely unexpected. S&P 500's index rose by about 60% in the course of the past two years: from 3,577 on 12 October

2022, to 5,762 on 30 September 2024. Now there is again a new surge of optimism after the US Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank entered a new cycle of lowering interest rates.

12. However, the situation remains very unstable. Average growth rates for the previous period and those expected for the period ahead are the lowest ever since WWII. And the “time bomb” at the base of the global economy remains unresolved: that is the high debt, public and private. This, has actually increased in the course of the past years, after the end of the pandemic, which were supposed to be years of restraint in order to tackle rising inflation. Global debt reached a new high of \$315 trillion, accounting for 333% of



global GDP, in the 1st quarter of 2024. Roughly 2/3 of the global debt is driven by the advanced economies. Overall global debt expanded by more than \$100 tr. in the last decade. And in nominal terms it increased by 21% since 2020, following the Covid pandemic. This situation, with huge bubbles in the stock exchanges and in real estate, at a time of low growth rates and high budget deficits and debts can simply not continue. Sooner or later, it will come down with a bang and will be reflected on the real economy most probably causing a serious recession.

The return of Trump

13. The majority of the European bourgeoisie was in favour of Harris winning the presidential elections in the US and it did not try to hide it. The same was true of the more serious bourgeois media and the main bulk of the capitalist class in Britain and in the US (with notable exceptions like that of Elon Musk). The outcome of the November 5 elections was quite a shock for the ruling classes of Europe and America, not only because Trump won the race but also because of the extent of his victory and the defeat of Harris.
14. It is obvious that Trump represents a big challenge for the US and the international working class and social movements. He will attack democratic, trade union, women's and LGBTQ2+ rights. He will give a further impetus to conservative and reactionary ideas and organisations in the US – including fascistic ones. He will encourage the rise and boldness of far-right parties and governments internationally. Having said these, we need to repeat what has been analysed in previous material of ISp that he does not represent fascism in the US, as sections of the Democratic Party (DP) tried to argue, hoping that in this way they could win the elections. The working class and the social movements will need to rise to the challenges that Trump represents to their rights – this is a matter related to class struggle in the US, Europe and internationally. It is also related to the perspective of the rise of new left forces that will challenge both the GOP and the DP, rather than getting trapped in the “lesser evil” illusions, cultivated by the DP and the petit bourgeois left currents.
15. One factor which is related to the development of class struggles in the US is that Trump could very well be faced with a serious recession in the US economy. It will in fact be strange if the contradictions that have piled up in the US economy do not cause the bubbles to burst and a recession in the US, in the coming period. This will certainly undermine Trump's present appeal. The US working class has not faced the defeats and betrayals of the kind that the European working class has faced – it is therefore in many ways in a better shape than its European counterparts to fight. The US working class is “fresh”, in the sense that it comes from a period of relative successes and fighting spirit.
16. From the point of view of the international impact of Trump's election, he has already declared that he will raise new, much higher barriers to trade with China, implementing a horizontal 60% tariff on all Chinese imports. That he will implement additional tariffs of 10%, 20% or more, on all imports, including from US' allies. That he will stop the war in Ukraine and that he will stop

financing European NATO. Trump is blackmailing the European members of NATO to increase defence expenditure to at least to 2% of their GDP, refusing to finance their “protection”.

17. It is not possible to predict at this stage how far Trump will go with what he’s declared. But even if he does not apply his declarations to the full, all of these policies represent time bombs in the international situation, economically and geopolitically. The increase in tariffs, giving the US economy a further push into protectionism, will have as a direct result the further fall of the rates of growth of the global economy and the rise of inflation. They will cause a stronger reaction from China, which up until now has responded mildly to the US and Europe’s protectionist measures. These factors will undermine growth in both the US and Europe as well as globally.
18. Additional arms expenditure by the European powers is further destabilising the European economies which are already overloaded with high budget deficits and public debts. If Trump withdraws from supplying Ukraine with arms, the European powers will find themselves having to spend more, at least for a while, to keep Ukraine fighting – in a war, however, that cannot be won. In any case the European countries will have to increase arms expenditure, in the context of the new global arms race that is in progress, further weakening their economies. The increased arms expenditure, inevitable in the present epoch of global confrontation for domination, already in process and intensifying, can have a certain impact on the economies, but it cannot solve any of the fundamental problems at the base, as it will come up against the high budget deficits and sovereign debts.
19. World capitalism is faced with a multi-level crisis, as analysed in other material by ISp. US protectionism is a reflection of the weakness of the US economy to compete in the international markets and to keep its share of world production and trade, it is not a reflection of a position of strength. Trump is a symptom of this crisis, as is the general rise of the Far Right internationally. Trump’s policies will not solve any of the contradictions of US capitalism. His rise itself, and particularly his return, is a symptom not only of the cyclical crisis of capitalism but also, and more importantly, of the historical decline of the West – of US and Europe, in an epoch of intensified antagonisms, a new arms race and social militarization.

War

20. The main European powers have been following the US “blindly” in its confrontational economic and geopolitical policies, towards China and Russia, in the recent years. This will continue as the main trend, although it is correct to say that if Trump goes over the top, the European powers, especially Germany and France, will have to take initiatives to present a semi-independent stand. But this won’t stop the decline of Europe. Some spokespersons of European powers, not surprisingly many coming from the “progressive”, so called, parties (social-democratic, centre left) claim that Trump’s rise provides an “opportunity for Europe”, to stand on its own feet and develop an independent stand and presence in the world situation. Such reformist illusions miss the point: Europe’s decline and crisis is not the result of “mistakes” or miscalculations by the European ruling classes; they have an objective cause; they are rooted in the development of the capitalist

system. In the course of the 20th century the centre of power moved from Europe to the US, in the present epoch it is moving to Asia and particularly to China. The US and Europe can try as hard as they wish to fight against these processes, but this battle is impossible to win in the long run; they can delay the rise of China (and Asia) but they cannot stop it.

21. The two major wars of the period we are passing through are further weakening the European ruling classes. Despite the huge efforts of the West to isolate Russia, they have failed. Economic sanctions have been implemented only by NATO's closest allies (Australia, New Zealand, Japan, S. Korea) while even the historical US allies have not followed suit (from Mexico to Saudi Arabia, from Chile to India). The recent (October 2024) meeting of BRICS took place in Russia, with 36 heads of state present, as well as the Secretary General of the United Nations.
22. The interests of the US and EU ruling classes were expressed, once again, in their support for Israel despite the genocide in Gaza. This facilitated the struggle to expose the classic propaganda methods of the West that appeal to democracy and peace, in the eyes of working-class people, to discredit the international regulatory system and to expose their hypocrisy.
23. The war in Ukraine has essentially been judged. Russia will keep the annexation of Crimea, the Donbass and the occupied territories (and in this sense will win the war) and this cannot be changed either by the F-16 fighter planes that Ukraine has been given, nor by the long-range missiles that can hit targets up to 300 km into Russia that the US, Britain and France have agreed to allow Ukraine to use. The war is judged by the forces on the ground, and despite whatever damage the long-range missiles can cause Russia, they cannot stop the advance of Russian troops in East Ukraine. Nor can they stop the Russian troops from, sooner or later, pushing the Ukrainian army out of the Kursk region; the invasion into Kursk by the Ukrainian army was a blunder, offering Ukraine no strategic advantages, only weakening their defences in Donbas.
24. The Middle East will remain in flames. Israel is fighting a war on many fronts. But it cannot have the victory it wants in the end – it cannot eradicate Hamas or Hezbollah; it cannot eliminate Iran. While it has achieved significant military results it cannot hope to stabilize the area. Syria will remain an uncontrollable country for a long time where armed fundamentalist militias and Turkish influence will be on the rise. All parts will be preparing for a future round. And Iran, an official ally of Russia and China now, as a member of BRICS, will want to acquire even more advanced military capabilities, including nuclear weapons. Russia, been treated by the West as a pariah, will be more than willing to help and it is an open question if the West can stop this.

Environment

25. Environment remains a key issue in the global situation, with catastrophic floods, heat waves, droughts, fires, and food crisis, with all estimates indicating that the “fight” against the 1.5°C rise has already been lost and the question is whether the 2°C can be avoided. On the present trajectory the planet is heading for a 3°C rise according to the UN. [October 2024 was 1.65°C warmer than pre-industrial levels; it was the 15th month out of the last 16](#) in which temperatures have exceeded the 1.5°C threshold. This year will once again be the hottest on record and Earth

will likely register an average reading of over 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for the first time (at the end of [2023 it is estimated that it rose by 1.49C](#)).

26. Yet, CO₂ emissions go from one record level to the next. According to the [Global Carbon Project](#), the global emissions of CO₂ due to fossil fuels are expected to reach new highs in 2024: +2.5% compared to 2023. The UN annual meetings on Environment, known as COP, always inadequate anyway, are more and more turning into a tragicomic event. This was the case particularly with the last two, held in the United Arab Emirates (COP28, in 2023) and in Azerbaijan (COP29 in November 2024). Here, it became clear that the people in power were more interested in promoting deals to sell their fossil fuels, rather than leading the fight to eliminate carbon emissions.
27. Trump is determined to ditch the Paris agreement on limiting the temperature rise to 1.5°C, but what is very indicative, at the same time, is that the key leaders of the EU, its president Ursula von der Leyen, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the French President Emmanuel Macron did not attend the last COP in Azerbaijan. They all have other, more important, priorities...
28. The increasing levels of climate change and capitalism's inability to reverse the danger it presents, have an important impact on consciousness and can play a role in shaping new political developments in the direction of the anticapitalist Left. The problem of green energy is a problem of the capitalist mode of production, not one of generation or storage capacity. We can produce enough KWH to sustain a good life, it just cannot be done within a system that it based on profit. It is the duty of revolutionary socialists to propose transitional programmatic measures aimed at building a green, sustainable, collectively-owned system of energy production transportation and storage while pointing out the limitations that the capitalist system imposes in this field.

Inequality

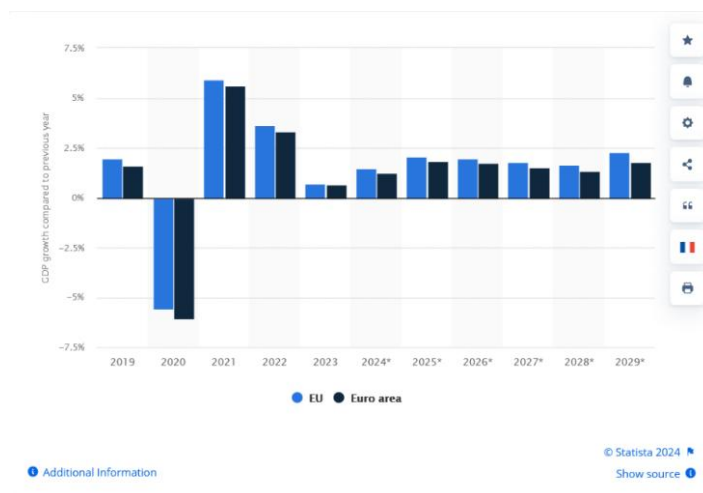
29. Despite the crocodile tears of numerous spokespersons of the capitalists, inequality continues to rise unabatedly. If we use as poverty line 5 \$ a day, then 40% of the world's population live in poverty. And if the poverty line is \$10/day, then 62% are in poverty. Currently international development assistance is a little over \$100 bn a year. This is more than 5 times less the annual income flows out of the poor countries to the rich. According to UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) net resource transfers from developing to developed countries have averaged \$700 bn a year, even after taking into account foreign aid assistance. Compare this with what workers and youth see happening at the tops: Elon Musk, just to site one example, "invested" around \$130 million to help Trump win the elections and in a few days after Trump's victory he saw TESLA's shares rise by around 30%, i.e., by about \$200 billion! [¹]
30. War, inequality, environment, women and LGBTQ+ issues, in the more general context of economic hardship and worsening living conditions for the huge majority, remain key issues in

¹ This changed in the first months of 2025, when Trump's policies lead to a collapse of the NY stock exchange. [See ISp Resolution on the US](#)

determining consciousness globally. This has not yet taken concrete forms politically; it has not been reflected in an anticapitalist/socialist consciousness on a mass scale; nor has it been reflected in the creation of political formations reflecting the interests of the working class and the oppressed in society. But it is a matter of time, before consciousness rises further, gives rise to new social movements and takes political shapes. Marxists need to patiently and energetically intervene and prepare on the basis of these perspectives.

European Capitalism in a Quagmire

31. For the whole of the 2010s growth in the main European countries has been very weak, so much

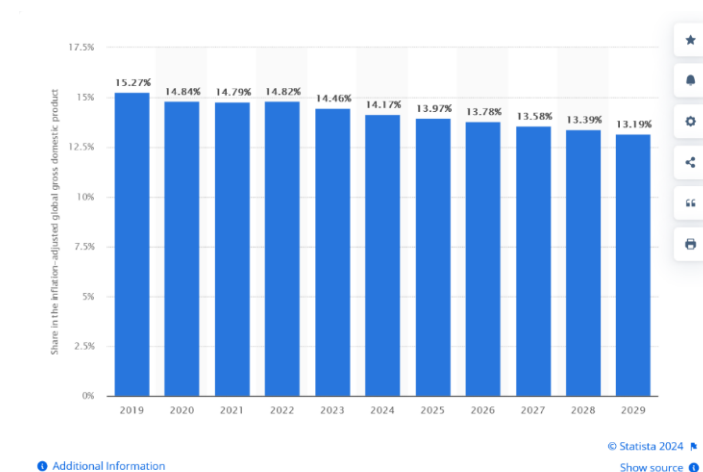


so that particularly as regards the more “developed”, industrial economies of Germany, France, Britain and Italy, it can be described as stagnation. The same general picture is predicted for the next years, [until the end of the decade](#), for the EU and for the EZ.

32. As a result of the low rates of growth, [the EU is losing ground in its share in global GDP](#) and expected to continue doing so in the years to come. This is the reflection of the historical decline of the EU on the

economic front. As if economic stagnation were not enough, Europe is entering a period of austerity (which will further undermine growth) with the re-application of the Stability and

Growth Pact (SGP) which was suspended at the time of the Covid crisis.



33. The SGP’s core aim is to prevent excessive deficit and debt levels, keeping budget deficits below 3% of GDP and public debt below 60% of GDP. The SGP’s fiscal constraints were suspended in 2020 to allow EU governments to prevent economic collapse at the time of the Covid pandemic, but now member states have to go back to the rules. This

means fiscal tightening for countries with high debts and deficits, like Italy, France, Spain, Belgium, Greece, etc and potential tax increases (already taking place or planned in some EU countries, and also Britain). This fiscal tightening, i.e., the application of constraints on social spending and on public investments, will be taking place at a time when China and the US are following expansionary policies. This means the EU will be losing further ground in the global economy.

34. The leading bourgeois circles are not attempting to hide their worries about where the EU is going. Conceptions which prevailed in EU circles, of the kind *“Europe will be forged in crises”* and *“Europe will be able to advance on the basis of minimum consensus”* are now blown to the winds, given the geopolitical antagonisms, the wars in Ukraine, Gaza and Lebanon, the economic stagnation or low growth and the divisions over migration, and “national priorities”. The notion of “greater European convergence” is today directly questioned, particularly by the far-right parties which are on the rise across the continent and Britain.
35. To put it simply the 27 countries of the EU see no way forward. Greater and deeper unification as the way to overcome the crisis, proposed by several capitalist spokespersons, is empty talk. There is open talk about the “lack of vision” and the “lack of leadership”. This, of course, is not a problem with individual leaders of different European countries – it is a reflection of the generalized, multilevel crisis faced by European capitalism.
36. In the past the EU used to “feed” its peoples with “visions”. The *Common Market*, the precedent to the EU, was supposed to help provide higher growth and standards of living and to serve peace on the Continent and internationally. Then the *Economic and Monetary Union*, the creation of the EU and later of the EZ was supposed to allow the European powers to lurch forward, and “become the most competitive economic block on the planet” – that was the moto that accompanied the launch of the euro at the turn of the Millennium. None of this happened.
37. The “lack of vision”, is a strong characteristic of the present period the EU is passing through. In the past decades all of the policies that the European ruling classes wanted to get through, were implemented in the name of the benefits that unification was to bring about – i.e., “economic growth”, “jobs”, “prosperity”, “peace”, etc. Nothing of the sort exists today. Big sections of the ruling classes turn to nationalism and to policies that first serve their “national” interests. This of course is coupled with the rise of the Far Right.
38. One of the recent blows to the idea of a “united” Europe has come from Germany itself. After forcing the European South into a nightmare on the issue of the excessive public debt after 2010, Germany encouraged rising deficits and public debts at the time of the Covid pandemic – showing their double standards. In September 2024 the German government blocked the “take-over”, i.e., the ownership of 25% of Commerzbank by the Italian UniCredit – so, following this line, the European market is “common” only if it serves the interests of the German ruling class. And a few weeks later, after the victory of the far right AfD in three consecutive federal state elections (see later), it proceeded to impose border land controls, thus dealing a blow to the Schengen

Convention which allows free movement between 29 European countries [2]. However, the ability of the German bourgeoisie to impose its terms unilaterally, as used to be the case until the mid-2010s, is no longer the case. Particularly so because there are serious frictions in the Franco-German axis which has always been the center of power and decision making in the EU and EZ.

Dreams of Convergence and the reality of Divergence

39. Big sections of the European bourgeoisie call for greater convergence, as the remedy for the EU's problems, and this is what is also reflected in the 400 pages of Draghi's report. But these proposals come at a time when the EU is actually diverging. One expression of this is the rise of the Far Right (FR) all over Europe, which is not only pushing in the direction of more "nationalist" policies, of "less" rather than "more" Europe, but also in relation to foreign policy, particularly in relation to Russia and China. Hungary and Slovakia are opposed to the EU's approach to the war in Ukraine, Czechia will probably join them very soon and Romania may follow.
40. The supporters of "more Europe" propose majority decisions, in order to avoid the headaches caused by those member states that refuse to agree to the major EU policies that demand unanimity. This will not solve any problems. It will turn the EU more and more into a federal structure in which different states follow different policies and create different alliances. This will intensify frictions and paralysis within the EU, it will not mean "more" but "less" Europe.
41. This is the direction in which the EU is moving in the present historical conjuncture. The EU has been able to achieve greater convergence at times of rapid economic growth. At times of economic recession or stagnation, paralysis ensues. Not accidentally Brexit took place in the aftermath of the 2007-8-9 economic crisis.
42. These processes are a reflection of the fact that the EU is not and cannot be a unitary state, it is a formation that tries to unify as much as possible the different interests of 27 different ruling classes. In times of major contradictions, economic, social, or geopolitical, this becomes impossible, different capitalist interests tend to clash rather than converge. This process goes hand in hand with the rise of the FR across the continent.
43. As a result of these contradictions, different member states provide assistance to Zelensky's government not on behalf of the EU but of themselves. The EU is imposing tariffs on Chinese electric cars but the Chinese giant BYD is building a massive plant in Hungary to export to the rest of the EU, free of tariffs. On the issue of the European tariffs on cars, this was passed with a thin relative (not even absolute) majority in the EU, because of many countries abstaining while a number voted against, including Germany.
44. The state of the European car industry is characteristic of the retreat of European manufacturing and of its inability to face the challenges of the global market and particularly to compete with

² This was not the first time the Schengen system faced blows. Since the "refugee crisis" of 2015 and then at the time of the Covid pandemic, many countries introduced border controls and kept them for years. It is clear that even on this level there are no safeguards against blatantly ignoring the rules, and no legal avenues to pursue in such situations.

Chinese products. Between the Summer and Autumn of 2024, the European auto industry was sending out signals of desperation. That refers to nearly all the major auto manufactures present in Europe. Stellantis, BMW, Mercedes Benz, Volkswagen, Porsche, Volvo (now under Chinese control) Aston Martin etc, saw their shares fall in this period by 20-40 % on average, reaching 50% in the case of Stellantis. As a result, we see a reduction in the number of workers in the industry, but also open talk about closing down factories, as is the case with VW for the first time in its 87-year history, Stellantis in Italy and England etc. The European auto-industry is faced with massive over-capacity: i.e., it cannot produce as much as its capacity allows, because it cannot sell what it can produce. [Capacity Utilization Rate](#) is as low as 56% for Germany (down from 70% in 2019), 52% for Britain, 50% for France and 38% for Italy!

45. The problems faced by the EU are related to the epoch of crisis faced by global capitalism and to the general economic and geopolitical instability, combined with the rise of the far-right parties which in turn is a reflection of the massive incapacity of the “left” parties to provide any perspective for the future. But it is also related to one specific factor within this context, and this is the crisis of the traditional alliance between Germany and France.

The Franco-German axis

46. The two key countries in the EU and EZ are Germany and France, not only because they are the most powerful economies but also because the EU and the EZ have been based, from their inception, on the close collaboration between the two, always working together in the background, first to prepare the launch of the EU and the EZ and then to prepare the policies that they considered most appropriate for their common project. In the recent period the differences are becoming more evident and sharper; the two countries have differences over economic policy, and they both face very serious economic problems and political instability.
47. In November (2024) German Chancellor Olaf Scholz sacked his Finance Minister, Kristian Lindner, of the Liberals (Free Democratic Party), thus bringing the governing tri-partite alliance of the Social-democrats (SPD), Liberals (FDP) and Greens to an abrupt end. Germany will thus go to early elections in February 2025. This is a reflection of the problems faced by the German economy and the differences within the coalition over the economic policies to be followed: the economy is facing recession or stagnation for the past two years, expected to continue through 2025; Europe has to move in the direction of cuts and austerity; there is a significant budget deficit in the region of 9 billion euros that needs to be put under check; there has been a major conflict inside the German cabinet with the Liberals demanding tax increases and cuts in government expenditure; the Social Democrats on the other hand have been pushing to “break the rules” of the Stability Pact; last but not least, the Greens have been protesting because the plans for green growth have been ditched.
48. Scholz and his SPD are nearly certain to lose the coming elections. According to the recent polls only 14% of the German population say they are satisfied with the government. The Christian Democrats (with their CSU allies) are expected to receive around 32%, [while SPD only 16%](#), and

come third, after the far-right AfD. The three governing parties together could receive less than 1/3 of the vote. The parties expected to gain more from the next elections are the far right AfD (Alternative for Germany) and the left-conservative-antiimmigrant BSW (Sarah Wakenknecht Alliance).

49. The state of the German economy, which until 2007 was the third largest economy on the planet (after USA and Japan) is a good indicator of the impasse faced by European capitalism. In a common statement, the top 5 economic institutes of Germany (DIW, IfW, Ifo, IWH and RWI) predict that growth will be in the region of -0.1% for 2024, 0.8% for 2025 and 1.3% for 2026.
50. Manufacturing was the pride of the German economy, but it's losing ground rapidly. The case of the auto industry, failing to compete with Chinese products is a characteristic example. After Trump's victory in the US elections, things would be much worse for Germany, and for the whole of the EU. According to Ifo, the most esteemed of the German economic institutes, German auto exports could fall by as much as 32% while the drop in pharmaceutical products could be as high as 35%.
51. [French economic growth](#) is not as bad as the German one, but the picture is far away from good. Growth was at 0.7% in 2023 and is projected to be the same (0.7%) for 2024. The budget deficit is much higher than the Maastricht Treaty allows for, and the public debt is one of the highest in the EU at 110.6% in 2023, projected to 112.4% for 2024 and 113.8% for 2025. France plans around 60bnEUR in spending cuts and tax hikes next year in an attempt to cut back a widening budget deficit. The savings are required to bring the budget shortfall to 5% of economic output from around 6.1% this year. According to France's 2025 budget, public debt is expected to rise to 115% of GDP from 113% in 2024.
52. The social situation, conditioned by Macron's neoliberal policies, has seen a rise in class struggle, (taken up later in the document) and a rise of the far-right *National Rally* (RN), led by Marine Le Pen. The June 2024 Euroelections marked a turning point for political developments in France, as Le Pen led the polls. Faced with this, Macron tried to keep the initiative, by immediately calling snap elections a few weeks later, in July. He tried to make use of the usual "lesser evil" blackmail, traditionally used by the centre right in France, i.e., "vote me against the extremists". To the great disappointment of the French bourgeoisie, the main winner of the July elections was Jean Louk Melanchon, leader of the left party *La France Insoumise* and of the *New Popular Front* created to contest the elections (see later). Despite his defeat, Macron used his presidential power to form a government of his own choice, with the support of Marine Le Pen.
53. In short, both Germany and France, are losing ground on the economic front, are faced with unstable and weak governments and, as will be shown later, with rising class struggles. Thus, the "brains" of the EU are preoccupied with their own internal problems and with their own "national" interests; this can only undermine the EU perspectives, particularly the ideas of greater convergence and of a bigger role by the EU in the international scene and global balance of power.

Additional features

54. This document does not aim at providing a detailed picture of what is happening in different countries of Europe, on the economic, social and political level. It attempts to describe general processes. The role of the dominant economies is quite clear in determining such processes. Italy as the third major power of the EU needs to be mentioned, as well as Britain because of its economic weight though not a member of the EU. Other countries will be mentioned later on because of the importance they have in other fields, e.g., class struggle and political developments, despite not having some particular weight economically.
55. Italy has been traditionally a country of great political instability within the framework of a long-standing Christian Democrat hegemony and an incapacity of the Communist Party (CP) opposition to fight for its overturn. The end of the Cold War brought the end of this historical arrangement (leading to the collapse of the traditional parties of Italy: Christian Democracy, the Italian CP and the Socialist Party) and in combination with the economic crisis and the frictions created by the processes of European integration gave rise to “unusual” political phenomena. Such phenomena have been Bossi, then Salvini and the *Lega*, (a federalist/independentist party from the wealthier areas, later developing into a reactionary nationalist force); Berlusconi and his *Forza Italia* (a liberal conservative party personally owned by a big businessman); Grillo and today Conte with the *5-star movement* (a populist force, combining progressive and reactionary traits, now part of the Left in the EU parliament) and others.
56. “Super Mario”, as Mario Draghi became established after stating “we’ll do whatever it takes to save the Euro” and thus supposedly saving the Euro at the time of the debt crisis of S. Europe, didn’t have much luck as PM of Italy in 2021. He only lasted 1.5 years and was forced to resign. His main “achievement” was to prepare the ground for Georgia Meloni, leader of the far-right *Fratelli d’ Italia* and prime minister of Italy today. Meloni has shown that, despite many “anti-systemic” declarations, once in power she adjusted very well with the needs of the Italian bourgeoisie (and the latter showed that it could accommodate a far-right representative equally well). Meloni has not challenged either the EU or NATO on any of their major political decisions since the time she took over in 2022. She now looks like the strongest leader among the major European powers, but this is because of the weakness of everybody else, not because of her own strength or the strength of the Italian economy and political system. Italy remains a weak major industrial country and this is manifested by the state of its economy: with a budget deficit of 7.4%, a public debt at 112.4% of GDP and a capacity utilization in its car industry of 38% (reflecting the more general picture of Italian manufacturing) there isn’t much room for stability.
57. Britain was never able to get over the implications of the crisis of 2007-8-9. This led to Brexit, in 2016, which, of course, did not solve any one of the problems of British capitalism. It would be wrong to blame the problems of the British economy on Brexit, it is correct to state that either inside or outside the EU, there was no way out of the blind alley of British capitalism. It is an irony that the “wise” and arrogant strategists of capital on continental Europe pointed their finger to

Britain, predicting doomsday because of Brexit, only to find themselves in a similar situation to that of Britain soon after that.

58. The past few years have seen one of the most tumultuous political periods in recent British history: All governments between 2016 and 2024 have been weak and unstable. This was also the period when the FR was able to establish itself as a powerful player. Labour won the 2024 elections only because the Tories collapsed. Starmer is probably the most right-wing leader of the Labour party that has ever existed. Soon after his election to office he announced that he received “barren land” from the Conservatives and that a period of austerity was necessary. He has a stable parliamentary majority, due to the collapse of the Conservatives but although there has been a lull in industrial disputes since Labour’s victory, garnered by Labour being backed, at least in the short term, by key trade unions like GMB, UNISON, RMT and UNITE, this “honeymoon period”, will be short lived as groups of workers see the concessions promised peter out and austerity enacted. Potential struggles are already building amongst teachers and nurses.
59. There has been a lot of talk among bourgeois analysts, in the course of 2024, that the weaker economies of the periphery i.e., the South, the East and the Balkans, are growing much faster, balancing the retreat of the main powers. This is not serious talk. The heavily indebted South, with a great dependence on tourism and agriculture cannot in anyway counterbalance the economic retreat of the major industrial economies and cannot provide a way forward.
60. Two surprise political developments one in Cyprus and the second in Romania are worth mentioning. In the June 2024 Euro-elections in Cyprus, an individual who had no relationship to anyone of the political parties, Fidias Panayiotou, was elected to the European Parliament. In the first round of the presidential elections of Romania in November 2024, a candidate who was portrayed as an absolute outsider, by both mainstream and independent media (even though he was invoked by former president of Romania, Traian Băsescu, as an option for the seat of PM as early as 2011, and resurfaced in 2020 as AUR’s proposal for PM) with only around 1% in the preelection polls (he averaged 6-7% just before the elections) came first with 22.9% of the vote. Georgescu shocked the West, because of his anti-Ukraine, pro-Russian positions and will face, in the 2nd round a neo-liberal pro-Western candidate^[3]. There is nothing progressive about these two. But they are a very powerful reminder of the huge vacuum that exists in the political scene.
61. An important feature of the political situation in Europe over the last two decades has been the resurgence of what is described as “left”, “progressive” or “civic” nationalist movements in several Western European countries. In Ireland, Sinn Féin (SF) went from being the second party of nationalism in the north (Northern Ireland) to being the largest nationalist party by 2001, and then the largest party overall in 2022. In the south of Ireland, they went from a foothold with one seat in the Dail (parliament) in 1997 only to being the largest party at the general election in 2019. The Catalan nationalist movement, with a large left component, felt confident enough to take

³ In the end, Georgescu was prohibited from running in the new round of elections “for breach of the constitution” and is currently placed under judicial control. According to the Romanian authorities, they found evidence of “unfair campaign practices” and of armed groups that were prepared to destabilize the state on behalf of Georgescu.

on the Spanish state in the abortive independence referendum in 2017. The Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) overtook the Scottish Labour Party as the major party in the urban areas in the early years of this century and in 2007 became the governing party in Scotland, and came close to delivering a vote for independence in the referendum in 2014. All three movements have suffered a severe setback in the last year. SF went backwards in the local, general and European elections in the south of Ireland, SNP lost a swathe of seats to Scottish Labour in the UK General Election and left Catalan nationalist groupings lost vote share in this year's elections in the Spanish state. Left nationalist movements gained momentum because of, firstly, the crisis of capitalism and secondly, because of the inability of the left to answer the questions of working-class people. Just as the Left has fallen behind, now too has left nationalism, but everywhere, variants of right wing, irredentist and exclusionary nationalism have come to the fore.

62. As regards the national question in general, it should be mentioned that none of the national problems characteristic of quite a number of EU countries has been resolved; on the contrary they are faced with deadlocks, with the possibility of serious conflicts reappearing. South East Mediterranean and the Balkans face the most explosive problems. The Greek-Turkish antagonism over the Aegean is becoming deeper and more dangerous, with a frenzied arms race taking place. The Cyprus problem is in complete stalemate with the Turkish side stating that it refuses to discuss anything other than two separate states on the island. The discovery of hydrocarbons in south east Mediterranean has polarized the situation even more, with Turkey blocking the efforts of Cyprus, Greece and Israel to form a block to exploit the possibilities for themselves, keeping Turkey and North Cyprus out. In the Balkans the conflict between Serbia and Albania over Kosovo remains unresolved. Serbia refuses to recognize Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence, and there are periodic flare ups particularly with the Serb-minority in northern Kosovo. The problems between North Macedonia on the one hand and Greece and Bulgaria on the other, over the issue of the name, the Bulgarian minority present there and language and historical interpretations, have stalled EU accession talks for N. Macedonia. Capitalism has no way of solving such problems. Only the working class can do so, on the basis of its common class interests. The precondition for this, of course, is the creation of mass workers' organisations based on a Marxist perspective.
63. The Eurozone crisis exposed how hollow the claims of EU economic integration and solidarity really were. And the 2015 refugee crisis made the cracks in its united policies even more clear. While most countries would not accept their proportionate share of refugees, and a few would not accept a token number of refugees, some would not even allow the desperate masses escaping war and hunger to pass through their territory on their way to Germany! Since then, the EU has made sordid deals with Turkey and Libya to limit the number of desperate people who can arrive at its borders.
64. And yet, while the bourgeois press talks about "waves" of refugees "swamping" the indigenous population, almost giving the impression that there was not even any standing room left in the EU, there is a demographic crisis facing about half of the EU members, especially the most industrially developed ones. Eleven EU countries, including Germany, Italy and Spain, have fertility rates below

the UN's "ultra-low" threshold of 1.4. Even France with the highest EU fertility rate, 1.68 in 2023, is at its lowest level since the end of the war in 1945. Considering that the replacement level is said to be 2.1, the EU's demographic outlook is bleak. Some countries will see a fall in their population in a few years. Italy, for example, could have a drop of 1 million in its population by 2030. Italy's declining fertility rate (1.2 in 2023) and ageing population will impact its health service, retirement age and pension levels, reproductive rights, labour rights and so on.

65. The falling fertility rates and aging populations will also impact the GDP growth of the EU. The EU already has a lower level of labour productivity than the US and is losing further ground. For example, between the fourth quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2024, in the industrial sector, hourly labour productivity increased by 8.8% in the United States, whereas in the Eurozone it increased by just 0.8%. But bourgeois ideology never lets the facts get in the way of undermining working-class solidarity and reinforcing capitalist rule. The facts are made to stand on their head in ideological and cultural campaigns to vilify and demonise immigrants, particularly if they are Muslim and/or black.

Entering recession?

66. The recent figures show that the economy of Europe as a whole is in retreat and is possibly moving into recession. The figures for the [Purchasing Manager's Index \(PMI\) for November](#) show a retreat not only as regards manufacturing but also as regards services, which until October tended to act as a counterweight to the decline in manufacturing. PMI for services in November was at 49.2 (i.e. below 50 which is the border line between growth and contraction) from 51.6 in October; while the PMI for manufacturing went further down, to 45.3 from 46 in October (i.e. manufacturing was already in contraction in October).
67. The state of the European economies, the closures and the loss of full-time well-paid jobs to be replaced by badly paid or precarious employment, the attacks on trade union and democratic rights, the attack on social services, etc, has been coupled with rising inflation which has drastically eroded living standards. Despite the fact that inflation (in Europe and the US) is now close to the target of the central banks of around 2%, on average, cumulative inflation in the industrial countries (OECD average) rose 30 % between December 2019 and September 2024 but wage increases in the same period are lagging far behind. What is worse for working class people is that food inflation, (i.e. the rise in the price of food, which affects working-class living standards the most) increased by 50% over the same period. It was inevitable that these conditions would give rise to a new period of increased class struggle.

Class struggle

68. 2022 and 2023 were years of heightened class struggles in a whole series of European countries, as was predictable, (see perspectives 2022 document) mainly as a result of the rising inflation and the drastic erosion of workers' incomes. This was the opposite of what happened at the time of the Covid recession. 2024 was a year of lower levels of class struggle. The pressure on wages decreased as a result of inflation having fallen to around 2%, the struggles of the 2022-23 period

had limited results and also because struggles never develop on a continuous upward path but have ups and downs. This is also linked to the role of trade union leaderships – to the fact that the struggles in their majority were forced on the Union leaderships by pressure from below. And, again, because the parties of the Left, of all colorations, have not been able to offer a fighting perspective to workers and society in general. A short reference to some of the more important struggles that were notable in Europe, follows below. Obviously, it is not possible and there is no point in listing every single struggle in each and every country.

69. After the Yellow Vest (Gilets Jaunes) protests in **France**, which began in November 2018 and lasted throughout 2019 (with occasional flare-ups in later years), 2022 and 2023 saw a new wave of mass protests. These protests were initially sparked by rising fuel taxes and the cost of living but quickly evolved into a broader movement particularly against Macron’s attempt to increase pension age from 62 to 64. In the course of 2023, 14 general strikes were called in France. In the first strike, January 19, 2023, 2 million took part in the demonstrations nationally. 2.8 million took part in the demonstrations of January 31, according to the trade union confederation CGT. The coordination of strikes by all of France’s major trade unions –transport, energy, education, public sector, etc.– has been described as a “rare show of unity”. These protests peaked around May Day 2023, where hundreds of thousands rallied across France.
70. In **Germany**, strikes across sectors, including transport and public services, were frequent in 2022. The key issue was rising inflation and its impact on wages, with unions such as *Verdi* playing a central role. Workers in the transport sector, in particular, staged walkouts, demanding better pay amidst rising living costs. Also, healthcare and postal services went on significant industrial action. German unions, particularly *IG Metall*, organized numerous protests, including a large May Day demonstration in 2023 that mobilized almost 300,000 people across 400 events. The country also saw climate-related protests, particularly from the youth, demanding stronger government action on environmental policies.
71. The **UK** saw a wave of strikes, particularly in the second half of 2022. Rail workers, nurses, postal workers, and public sector employees all staged significant industrial action. Rail unions, like the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), led multiple strikes. The “Winter of Discontent” was marked by coordinated strikes, particularly from nurses and postal workers, demanding wage increases in line with inflation. Strikes continued throughout 2023, with teachers, NHS workers, rail workers, and civil servants staging walkouts. The UK’s “summer of strikes” highlighted growing unrest across many sectors. Britain, after decades of lagging behind in struggles, in the course of 2022-23 found itself at the forefront of struggle in Europe – a development of historical, we can say, importance. The election of the Labour government led to a temporary suspension of mass action due to the government settling numerous long-standing pay disputes with the support of the tops of key trade unions.
72. **Spanish** truck drivers, initiated protests in March 2022 against soaring fuel prices. There were also significant strikes in the healthcare and education sectors, calling for better working conditions and pay. Spanish Unions organized over 70 marches in 2023, calling for wage increases to match

inflation. While many rallies focused on labor rights, there was also strong support for reducing the workweek to four days.

73. **Italy** also saw significant labor protests over anti-poverty measures and changes introduced by Giorgia Meloni, especially among logistics, e-commerce, and food distribution workers. But in general, the Italian movement never took off in the past couple of decades after the betrayal, collapse and disintegration of the PRC (Party of Communist Refoundation – Rifondazione Comunista). Platform workers have mobilized in other countries as well – eg in **Cyprus, Russia and Turkey**. In **Romania** we had a very important strike by the teachers in secondary school education. In **Belgium**, 80,000 workers participated in the “National Day of Action”, called by the Unions between 20 and 22 March (2023) – the unions refused to call a strike despite the mood in the workers. In **Greece**, in the general lull of the working-class movement, characteristic of the situation after SYRIZA’s betrayal of 2015, two very successful general strikes took place, in November 2022 and in March 2023, indicative of the efforts of the mass movement to find its pace, despite the role played by the TU leaders. One of the most important strikes that took place in Europe was the strike against **TESLA** which acquired an all-Scandinavian character.
74. The attack on trade union and other rights continues unabated. Meloni in Italy is making consistent efforts to limit the ability of trade unions to call strikes. In Greece, the right-wing ND (New Democracy) government with a strong presence of its far-right wing in the cabinet, has introduced the 6-day week plus legalizing the “right” of workers to work up to 13 hours a day – that makes a total of 72 hours for a working week! This blatant attack was carried through without even one shot fired by the trade unions to try to oppose it. This is one of the best ways to understand the extent of the defeat faced by the Greek working class, the responsibility for which lies of course with the leadership of SYRIZA and the renegade Tsipras.
75. 2024 started with **farmer mobilizations** across different borders in Europe – in Germany, France, Belgium, Romania, Italy, Spain (especially Catalonia), Poland and Greece, etc organizing road blockades and rallies to raise their demands. These protests expanded from one country to another with speed, indicating that particularly in the present epoch, with fast transmission of information, protests can spread quickly and acquire mass character, without the union leaders planning or even wanting such a development. This, of course, is even more the case with workers’ struggles – the **train strikes in Europe** in the course of January 2023, starting from Germany and causing 80% of long-distance trains to come to a standstill, soon expanded to Italy, where we had a 24hr transport strike, to Britain (UK and North Ireland) etc. This shows the inherent and instinctive class solidarity and internationalism across borders, but the train union leaders refuse to take any initiative to organise/coordinate struggle on an all-European basis. As a result, we see moves by workers in various countries to move to what is described as “independent unions”, “grass roots Unions”, “base committees”, reflecting different traditions from country to country. These are important moves, particularly by new layers of workers outside the traditional industries, but they are still at an incipient stage.

76. We are in a period of rising class struggle. Not only in Europe but globally. This will inevitably continue throughout the period we are going through because the capitalist system has no way of overcoming its crisis and providing better conditions of life for the working class, the youth and the poor. The exceptional characteristic of the present period however is that the “radicalism” developing in society is not directed towards the left but towards the right, leading to the re-emergence on a mass scale of the Far Right, to an extent we have never seen since WWII. The reasons are obviously related to the crisis of the Left – in an epoch of economic and social crisis reformists are not in a position to offer reforms, so they end up in an existential crisis which in turn bears its cost on the working class.

The Far Right

77. The emergence of the Far Right and its development into a major force in Europe and internationally has been extensively taken up in the document [“The Rise of the Far Right and the battle against it”](#) of the last conference of ISp (March 24). In the present document we’ll deal with some updates and repeat some of the general conclusions.

78. The most recent elections to the time the present document is being drafted, have been the ones in **Austria** (30.09.2024). The winner was the far-right *Freedom Party* (FPÖ) with 28.8% and an increase of 12.6 percentage points (pp) since the previous elections in 2019. The traditional right-wing *People’s Party*, ÖVP, lost 11.1 pp down to 26.3%; the Social-democrats, SPÖ, received 21.1%, marginally lower than 2019; and the Greens, paid their presence in the previous government, losing 5.6 pp down to 8,3%.

79. In the weeks before the Austrian elections we had elections in three federal states in Germany. In **Brandenburg** (22.09.2024) the far right *AfD* came second, with 29.2% (up by 5.7 pp from the 2019 elections) only marginally behind the Social-democratic SPD which ended first with 30.9%. The *Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance* (BSW) debuted at 13.5%; the Greens collapsed and fell short of the 5% threshold, losing all their seats. *The Left* (Die Linke) collapsed to 3% (also missing the 5% threshold), from 10.7% in 2019. A similar pattern was repeated in Saxony and Thuringia on September 1st. In **Saxony** the AfD won 30.6%, marginally behind the Christian Democrats (CDU)

which received 31.9% and BSW debuted at 11.8%. In **Thuringia** the *AfD* came first with 32.8% far above the second, CDU, which won 23.6%; BSW received 15.8% while Die Linke (which was leading the state government together with the SPD and Greens) collapsed to 13% from 31%.

80. The pattern is similar all over Europe: the traditional bourgeois parties, Conservative (Christian

Group	Seats	Change	Seats %
European People's Party	188	+12 ▲	26.1 %
Socialists and Democrats	136	-3 ▼	18.9 %
Patriots for Europe	84	+35 ▲	11.7 %
Conservatives and Reformists	78	+9 ▲	10.8 %
Renew	77	-25 ▼	10.7 %
Greens	53	-18 ▼	7.4 %
Left	46	+9 ▲	6.4 %
Europe of Sovereign Nations	25	0	3.5 %
Nonaligned	33	-29 ▼	4.6 %

Participation: 50.74% (+0.1%)

Democrat) and Social Democratic, are losing ground; the winner is the Far Right; the Left parties fail to provide any kind of perspective and are facing defeats and, often, marginalization and crisis.

81. In November 2023, in the **Netherlands**, Geert Wilders' far-right *Freedom Party* (PVV) won the Dutch general elections. In **Italy**, Giorgia Meloni was elected as Prime Minister following the general elections held on September 25, 2022. In **Hungary** Victor Orbán has been continuously in power, since his 2010 re-election, having won multiple consecutive terms, including his most recent re-election in April 2022.
82. In **France** Marine Le Pen has been steadily increasing her appeal over the past decade: In the 2012 Presidential Election (her first run for president) she finished third in the first round with 17.9% of the vote. In the 2017 Presidential Election she reached the second round but lost to Emmanuel Macron with 33.9% of the vote (Macron got 66.1%). In the 2022 (April) presidential elections she reached the second round but lost to again to Macron, receiving 41.5% of vote, Macron winning with 58.5%. In **Poland** the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) was in power between 2015 and 2023 (as well as 2005-7) and is currently the main opposition force.
83. Similar processes exist in Scandinavia. In **Finland**, as of 2023, the *Finns Party* (formerly True Finns) is in a coalition government. In **Sweden** the *Sweden Democrats* (Sverigedemokraterna, SD) became the second-largest party, in the 2022 general election, securing 20.5%. In **Norway** the *Progress Party* (Fremskrittspartiet, FrP) received 11.7% in the 2021 parliamentary elections. **Poland** is also run for most of the past 20 years by the Law and Justice Party (PiS) and in **Belgium**, the two far-right parties, *New Flemish Alliance* and *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest) received around 28% of the total vote and 50% of the Flemish vote.
84. The reality of **Southern Europe** is a clear testimony of the relation between the crisis of the Left and the rise of the FR. **Italy** is an example: the second Prodi government marked, on the one hand, the definitive shift of the “progressive” (so called) pole into a liberal framework and on the other hand, the exclusion of leftist forces from parliamentary representation and the disintegration of the PRC. This created the conditions for the rise of an “ambiguous” movement like the *Five Star Movement*, which, by the end of the following decade, consolidated reactionary support in the country through its government with the *League*. In the rest of the countries of southern Europe we see similar, though not identical processes. The rise of the FR takes part in the second part of the 2010s, i.e. after the masses turned to the parties of the New Left (in Cyprus they elected the traditional left party, AKEL, to power for the first time in its history) in the aftermath of the 2007-8-9 crisis, only to be massively disappointed. The FR, taking advantage of the economic and social problems as well as the crisis of the Left, experienced very fast growth. In **Greece**, the far-right parties in the 2024 EU elections received between them an unprecedented 21% of the vote – combined with an equally unprecedented abstention rate of nearly 60%. In **Portugal** the far-right Chega received 1.3% in 2019, 7.2% (12 seats) in the 2022 and 18.1% (50 seats) in the 2024 elections. In **Cyprus**, ELAM, sister organisation of the Greek Golden Dawn with clear neofascist elements in its programme and activities, received only 0.2% in the EU elections of 2009; in 2014, 2.7%; in 2019, 8.3% and in 2024, 11.2%, becoming the third major political force

on the island. In **Spain**, VOX, launched in 2014, won 10.3% (24 deputies) in the April 2019 general elections and 15.1% (52 seats) in the November elections of the same year. In the 2023 general elections it lost some ground but still received 12.4% of the vote and remained third force.

85. What needs to be repeated here as well, already stressed in [previous material by ISp](#) is that the FR parties are not fascist parties. The fundamental dividing line is that fascism destroys physically the organisations of the working class and the basic bourgeois rights provided in a parliamentary system. The far-right parties of the present epoch cannot do that, the balance of power does not allow them. However, the damage they can incur, by suppressing democratic, trade union, women's, lgbtq+ rights, cannot be underestimated. Despite this, there is time for the working class to regroup its forces and fight back.

Consciousness and the Left

86. The general landscape from the point of view of the working class and the struggling masses in Europe is full of contradictions: there is a general negative background, a retreat in struggle and consciousness compared to previous epochs, but within this general picture there are important developments and processes taking place (one can say of a “molecular character”) that point to the future and prepare major changes.
87. The general picture is determined to a large extent by two important events, of a negative character for the working class, in the last few decades. The first one is the **capitalist restoration in the Soviet Block**, which has been more extensively analysed in past material [\[2023 conference document\]](#). The second is the inability of the working class and the struggling masses to face up to the challenges posed by the **2007-8-9 great recession**. Both of these events, particularly the first, represented serious defeats for the mass movements.
88. The capitalist restoration in the East opened a period of negative developments as regards class struggle and class/socialist consciousness globally – this was particularly intense in the course of the 1990s, a very hard period for Marxist ideas and organizations. These began to be partially overcome towards the end of the decade, with the emergence of the anti-globalization movement, starting from Seattle, at the end of the Millennium. The 2000s were a period of rising struggles and consciousness. Though socialist ideas and the socialist perspective were still weak and distant, a new generation of fighters was entering the scene.
89. The collapse of the Communist Parties and the complete capitulation of the old reformist Social-democratic parties, which adopted and implemented neoliberal policies (Labour in the UK, PS in France, SPD in Germany, PSOE in Spain, PDS-DS and later PD in Italy, etc) created a vacuum in the Left. This, together with the rising social struggles, were reflected, in the course of the 1990s and 2000s, in the emergence of a number of “new left parties”, like the **PRC** in Italy, **Respect** in Britain, **SSP** in Scotland, **PtB** in Belgium, **SP** in the Netherlands, **Die Linke** in Germany etc. The anticapitalist Left had launched some initiatives that looked promising, like the **NPA** in France, and was able to build significant forces in some cases, especially in the cases of the **SP** and **PBP** in Ireland. New

movements were on the rise: antifascism/antiracism, anti-globalization, feminism and anti-sexism, environment etc.

90. The 2007-8-9 economic crisis seemed like the turning point that could push class struggle and class consciousness to new highs and in a more clearly socialist direction, on a mass basis. This perspective proved wrong. We had mighty struggles, particularly with the Arab revolutions in North Africa (known as “Arab Spring”) and Southern Europe’s “debt crisis” that gave rise to monumental struggles, especially in Greece. But these movements were defeated.
91. Reflected on the political front, these conditions created or gave mass dimensions to *a second generation of parties of the “New Left”* – of the kind of **SYRIZA** in Greece, **Podemos** in Spain, **Left Block** in Portugal, etc. They also led to the rise of the **Corbyn** and **Sanders** phenomena in Britain and the US respectively. The first part of the 2010s seemed to revive Left Reformism, as a mass phenomenon, on an international scale. But by the end of the decade, and despite a new wave of social explosions and revolutions in many ex-colonial countries, particularly in 2019, and the emergence, with a new dynamic, of the new movements against misogyny, sexism and the climate crisis, they had all capitulated and sold out. In this way the 2010s brought a “double defeat” – both on the level of TU and social struggles and on the political level. The Covid crisis also had the effect of cutting across struggles that were developing, especially around climate change.
92. The impact of these defeats is still felt today. At the same time there are many elements that are pushing consciousness forward, in a radical, left, and in the final analysis, socialist direction – but the processes are slow. There is massive anger in big sections of European societies. The mass of the population is fed up with empty promises and never-ending austerity and neoliberal policies. Precariousness is becoming more and more the dominant form of labour relations. Unemployment is “low” only because underemployment is high. Living standards have been eroded by inflation. Social services are being continuously attacked and privatized. The war in Gaza is exposing the criminal policies and the hypocrisy of the European powers. The attack on democratic rights, on the right to protest, demonstrate and even speak, using “antisemitism” as the pretext, is increasing the anger. These blend with the new movements of the recent period, feminism, LGBTQ+ and environment. The rise of the far-right parties and the neo-fascist groups, acts as a trigger to alert large sections of society, particularly the youth, to do something about it. These conditions are preparing struggles and big leaps in consciousness at a later stage.

Reformism – old and new

93. Historical experience about the role of Reformism has been abundant from the time of the first world war (WWI) to the Russian Revolution, to the interwar period, especially France and Spain in the mid-1930s, to the post WWII and in recent decades. Reformist parties not only abandon their claimed aim of “peacefully” creating a socialist society, but they betray the labouring masses and lay the ground for the return of reaction. Reaction, under conditions of deep crisis, can take the vicious form of the rise or re-emergence of the far right and fascist organisations. It also leads to the crisis of the organisations of the working class, political as well as trade union.

94. These lessons were never learned by the new reformist parties of the “New Left”, created in the post-Stalinist era, in the vacuum that was created by the capitulation of Social Democracy to capitalist neoliberalism and the collapse of the Stalinist, so called “Communist”, parties. The profound retreat in consciousness and organisation of the working class in Europe deepened further during the Great Recession of 2007-9 and resulted in a widespread retreat of all organisations within the workers’ movement, starting with the trade unions which increasingly interpreted their role as representing “one of the factors of production” and thus merely subsidiary to capitalist production. In this context, several historically reformist parties have essentially departed from the framework of the workers’ movement, whereas the New Left while often adopting a broad “anti-system”, or “progressive” stance, does so in a general and abstract way, without concrete references to the role of the working class and the overcoming of the present mode of production.
95. Europe provided the breeding ground for the emergence of a multitude of such, “new reformist” parties in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s which, in the huge majority of cases, failed to provide a perspective. It is valid to argue that today in Europe the vacuum in the Left has never been worse since the beginnings of the 20th century. Today the huge majority of mass left parties refuse to even mention the word “socialism” or even “nationalisation”. Inevitably, also, they fail to provide leadership in any consistent and fighting way to the struggles of the working class and the youth.
96. These factors have a decisive impact on the consciousness of the working class. The general level of class and socialist consciousness today is very low compared to previous epochs. As a result, we have a generalised crisis in working class organisations, on all levels, impacting on society and the mass movements.
97. This is something that will inevitably change: the severity of the economic crisis, the prospects and dynamics of military confrontations, the depth of the climate crisis, etc, are causing a clear crisis of hegemony among the ruling classes and fostering a widespread common awareness of the need for radical responses. We see many signs of the “search” inside labouring masses and the youth, a significant support for “socialist ideas” in general, albeit in a confused and blurred way, a defence of nationalized public utility companies against privatisations, etc. But as mentioned before, the processes are slow.
98. We have also seen that the broad masses, workers and youth, again and again, gave a huge impetus to new political formations whenever one such was on the horizon. This shows the huge potential which exists, and which is blocked by the weakness, retreat of consciousness and divisions inside the working class, coupled with the role of the leaderships in the New Left and in the trade unions.
99. The situation with the crisis of the working-class organisations and the general consciousness is in a number of ways worse in Europe than on other continents. The main reason for this is that the parties of the Left have been repeatedly tried in government and have failed in the past decades. This goes back to quite a long time, starting with the mass SD and Communist parties before the capitalist restoration in the ex-Stalinist states and then with the “new” reformism of the New Left.

Europe was traditionally the epicentre of the development of the working-class organisations and ideas, but today it's lagging behind developments in the Americas and other parts of the planet, in Asia and Africa. This does not mean that this picture won't change again in the future.

Greece

100. In the European context, following the recession of 2007–2009 and during the sovereign debt crisis, the rise of SYRIZA to government in Greece and the “OXI” in the 2015 referendum exemplified for large masses across the continent the possibility of breaking with austerity policies and outlining a systemic change. Resistance, in other words, seemed not only possible but also capable of imposing a different approach to managing the economic crisis. The capitulation of SYRIZA in 2015, when its leadership undertook to apply the policies demanded by the Troika, not only dashed the hope and expectations of millions, nationally and internationally, but also made an overall left alternative to the ruling classes less credible.
101. The outcome for the New Left was disastrous; and the impact on the mass movements huge. The Italian and Greek mass movements, despite their traditions of struggle and revolutions, have not yet recovered from the defeat and betrayals of the leaders of the parties of the New Left.
102. Syriza's capitulation in 2015 led to multiple fragmentations. None of them was able to form a sizeable left alternative – the vast majority went into crisis in the years that followed their split. The climax of SYRIZA's degeneration was the election of Kasselakis, to the leadership of SYRIZA. Kasselakis is a multi millionaire shipowner, who used to live in the US before coming to Greece in order to contest the leadership. What allowed this individual to claim the leadership of SYRIZA was not only the right-wing political course of SYRIZA but also the bonapartist regime established by Tsipras and the leadership majority in the party. The leader of the party, was not voted by delegates to the Congress, elected by party organisations, but by the broad supporters of the party – so, individuals could become “members” just by paying 2 euros as an annual due and vote for the president. The gay and lesbian community mobilized to vote for the first gay person to lead a mass political party in Greece and thus Kasselakis found himself leading a party in which he never belonged. Not even the right wing of the party could stomach this – the result was a second wave of splits, with SYRIZA now standing at 5% according to polls. Among other things, this also shows the tragic but also comic role that Identity Politics can play when put to the test.

Italy

103. Italy has been home to one of the most significant Communist Parties in the world and one of the most prominent left-wing movements in Europe. Even in the 1980s, despite the capitulations of the Italian CP and the unions (the “historic compromise” and incomes policy) they were still able to influence mass struggles (such as the sliding wage scale; anti-Euromissile and anti-nuclear movements; grassroots committees in schools and transportation; student movements in 1985 and 1989). The dissolution of the PCI and the emergence of a right-wing reformist party (PDS/DS) created the space for the recomposition of the Left. The PRC (Party of Communist Refoundation) reached around 100,000 members (by 2006) and garnered between 4.5% and 6% of the vote,

having peaked at 8.5% in 1996. It played a significant role in the workers' resurgence of the early 1990s, the anti-globalization movement and the labour conflicts of the early 2000s (FIOM and redundancy law).

104. The trajectory of the PRC was marked by various internal contradictions: between Stalinist and anti-Stalinist factions; between a "democratic alliance" and an alternative pole to the "two Rights" (centre left and right); between a "communist" orientation and a radical left approach. The decision to join the government (2006) and move beyond a "communist" profile (Rainbow Left) led to the parliamentary disaster of 2008, with the Left excluded from Parliament. Precisely when the hegemony of the ruling classes was being eroded by the crisis, there was no point of reference for social resistance. The reformist DS abandoned all ties with the working class, founding a liberal "progressive" party (PD under Veltroni and Renzi). The PRC split between "communist" factions and the radical left (2009).
105. Those years witnessed a heavy defeat for the working class, with the separate agreements on contracts in 2009 (disarticulation of collective bargaining), FIOM's capitulation at FIAT (followed by the collapse of the "social coalition" in 2015 and the poor 2016 contract renewal), and Renzi's attack (nominally from the Democratic Party). The profile of the Italian Left was profoundly altered. This led to the rise of the *Five Star Movement* and the consolidation of a reactionary bloc in 2018/2019. The Left retained a vanguard of tens of thousands of activists: the alternative networks with a reduced electoral appeal (1-2% of votes, often coalesced into unlikely, temporary lists tied to individual figures) and a multiplicity of groups (including what remains of the PRC; the PCI, a neo-Stalinist and Togliattian formation; Potere al Popolo, a Stalinist and populist force; and the Bordigist circles leading SiCobas); the reformist left reconstituted in the *Green-Red Alliance* (AVS, sectors that split from the PRC to the right with the Greens). Amid all this, any reference to the working class, and often any real mass influence, has been lost.

Portugal, Spain, Germany

106. Spain, Portugal and Germany have also seen the rise of important parties of the New Left, in the past decades. They are all now faced with crisis. The common characteristic in all, as in the above-mentioned examples, is that they have taken part in bourgeois governments – in Spain and Portugal on a national level, in Germany on a federal-state level.
107. Taking part in a bourgeois government can only take place on the conditions of the ruling class. In conditions of deep capitalist crisis, the system has no room for pro-working-class reforms. But that is also the time when the ruling class needs left parties in order to be able to govern, precisely because its rule is questioned by the masses. So, the parties of the Left end up applying the policies demanded by the capitalists, acting as "fire-fighters" against workers' struggles, ending up in crisis themselves, and preparing the ground for a return of reaction.
108. It is a tragic irony when "left" parties proclaim to be at the fore-front of the struggle against the far right when it is their policies that lay the ground for the FR's rise. Spain, Portugal and

Germany are characteristic examples of these processes. Vox in Spain only appeared in 2014, Chega in Portugal in 2019 and AfD in Germany in 2013. And they all had spectacular rise.

Bloco

109. *Bloco de Esquerda* (BdE – Left Bloc) was able to rise in the course of the 2010-5 debt crisis that shook southern Europe, from a small force, and to enter an alliance with the Socialist Party (and also the Communist Party and the Greens) of Portugal, to allow the SP to rule as a minority government. Their alliance continued after the next elections, those of 2019. The alliance collapsed in 2022, when the SP decided to aim for a majority government, so as not to depend on its left collaborators. In practice, the SP used the left parties, when it needed them to govern, and then ditched them. At its height in 2015 the Bloco had 19 seats in the Portuguese parliament, in the 2024 general elections it was down to 5. It is not an accident that the far-right party, *Chega*, was formed in 2019. Then, it got 1.3% of the vote, in the 2022 elections it received 7.15% and 12 seats. The vote for the Left Block was at 10.2% in 2015 and was the third largest party in parliament with 19 seats; it went down to 6.6% in the 2019 elections and to 4.6% in the 2022 elections with only 5 parliamentary seats. The 2022 defeat led to a change of leadership, with Mariana Mortágua, replacing Catarina Martins, seemingly attempting to push BdE to the left.

Podemos

110. *Podemos* (We Can) is famous for being created “through” the great movement of the *Indignados* that shook Spain in 2011 (part of the global “occupy movement” of the period). It was created in January 2014, by prominent academics and intellectuals. It stood for the first time in the Euroelections of 2014 and received 8% of the vote. One year later, in the general elections of 2015, it won 20.7% – the third-largest party, behind the People's Party (PP) and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), thus breaking Spain's traditional two-party system. In June 2016 it joined forces with the *United Left* to form the *Unidos Podemos* (United We Can) coalition. It received 21.1% of the vote, a slight increase compared to the previous election, failing to achieve its goal of overtaking the PSOE.

111. Soon after its creation Podemos moved more and more to the right. Pablo Iglesias, its most prominent leader, offered unequivocal support to Tsipras' sell out after the summer of 2015, intensifying internal divisions in Podemos. The internal regime was described as “direct” democracy through the internet; members could supposedly “contribute” and “vote” on line, but this only meant that the leadership was entirely unchecked, taking whatever decision, they wanted, ignoring everything they did not agree with and without the base of the party having any means to change the policies or the leadership itself. By April 2019 Unidos Podemos was down to 14.3% and in November 2019 in a repeat election due to political deadlock, down to 12.8%. As a natural outcome of its right-wing trajectory, Unidos Podemos formed a government with the PSOE. Pablo Iglesias served as Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Social Rights until 2021... when he left politics! In July 2023 Podemos joined a new coalition, *Sumar*, led by Yolanda

Diaz and received 12.4% of the vote (recent polls give Sumar round 10%). Essentially Podemos has no independent existence any more.

Die Linke

112. Die Linke was created in 2007 through the unification of WASG in West Germany, that split from SPD, and PDS which had its base in East Germany. From its first participation in elections for the federal parliament it received a very good result, of 11.9% – making it the fourth largest party in the Bundestag. But Die Linke failed to provide a left alternative vision to the German working class, either in the West or in the East. It's vote in 2013 fell to 8.6%, in 2017 it was slightly up, to 9.2%, but by 2021 it was down to 4.9%. It was under pressure from the Greens who increased their strength at its expense, but also from the far right AfD (created in 2013, but increased its support significantly after the refugee crisis of 2015-16) which undermined its support in East Germany, where Die Linke had its strongholds.

Sarah Wagenknecht

113. The case of BSW (Sarah Wagenknecht Alliance) mentioned earlier in the document, is worth attention. Sarah Wagenknecht split from Die Linke in October 2023, to create an alliance in her name and was far more successful than anyone could predict. BSW combines demands raised by the FR, especially on migration, combined with conservative ideas on feminist and LGBTQ+ issues, with demands for workers' rights. She takes antiwar positions, criticizing the German government and the EU, both in relation to Ukraine and to the war on Gaza (criticizing Israel, supporting the creation of a Palestinian state).

114. SW claimed that she created BSW in order to stop the rise of the AfD, but nothing of the sort happened. The success of BSW is of course a reflection of the crisis of Die Linke – which has no clear positions on the Ukraine war or Palestine and takes part in the federal-state governments, applying neoliberal policies in a routine manner. BSW failed to attract the AfD electorate, gaining most of its votes from disillusioned SPD supporters and former Die Linke voters.^[4]

Corbynism

115. The rise of *Corbynism* in the second part of the 2010s came as a surprise – of equal surprise and interest was the phenomenon of *Bernie Sanders* in the Democratic Party in the US. Corbyn took over the leadership of the British Labour Party (LP) and tried to give it a push to the left, but without being ready to come into open clash with the right wing. He failed and this allowed right wing reaction inside the LP to take back control, massacre the left of the party and expel even

⁴ In the [federal elections of February 23, 2025](#), BSW failed to pass the threshold for entering the Bundestag (5%). In this election, the AfD was able to nearly double its votes, coming second with 20.8% to the Conservatives (Christian Democratic Union, CDU, and its sister Christian Social Union, CSU) who received 28.6%. Die Linke was able to recover significantly winning 8.8%. This was partly due to a large mobilization by disillusioned ex-SPD and ex-Green voters to stop the FR – participation in the elections reached a record-breaking turnout of 82.5%.

Corbyn. He however stood in the recent general elections (July 2024) and was elected to parliament.

116. Today Corbyn is attempting an alliance with MPs who used to belong to the LP, to create some kind of a parliamentary oppositional group. This is completely inadequate. The conditions for a new working-class party in Britain do exist. And Corbyn could be a catalyst in its formation – but he has not been able to play this role due to his reformist constraints.
117. At the time of Corbyn's leadership of the LP, *Momentum* was created as a broad organisation to provide support to Corbyn's ideas both inside and outside the LP. It failed utterly, on the one hand because of its conservative right wing reformist ideas and on the other because of its completely bureaucratic top-down approach towards anybody who did not share the views of the leadership. Momentum showed once again that the potential which exists objectively for the creation of new left formations of a radical, if not openly socialist, character can be squandered by subjective factors, i.e. the role of the leadership.
118. Partly as a response to the war in Gaza and partly due to the further degeneration of LP, *The Collective* appeared towards the end of 2023, bringing together supporters of Corbyn, ex LP councillors, left independent candidates, groups and activists. The declared aim of the Collective is "Rebuilding A Mass Socialist Movement as A Foundation for A New Left Political Party". It remains to be seen if it will be successful in the declared target. But it is another indication of how mature the objective situation is for the creation of broad, radical left organisations, to provide a way forward to the working class and the other oppressed layers of society.

"La France Insoumise" and the "New Popular Front"

119. One of the few major left formations in Europe which has not been tested, exposed and in crisis, despite facing big challenges and many internal problems, is La France Insoumise (LFI), led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon (an ex-MP and minister of the French Socialist Party, from which he split in 2008). LFI combines radical left demands and slogans with mobilizations on the street, a nationalist programmatic framework and an essentially reformist approach. Created in 2016 it continues to grow in support. In the 2017 presidential elections, Mélenchon won the highest vote for a candidate to the left of the Socialist Party (PS) in the post WWII period. In 2022, he reached 22%, narrowly missing (by 1.2% of the vote) running against Macron in the second round.
120. In the 2024 general elections in France (June 30 and July 7) LFI took the initiative for the creation of the Nouveau Front Populaire (New Popular Front – NFP) an alliance between the LFI the Socialist Party (PS), the French Communist Party, the Greens and other smaller forces. This alliance first came into being in 2022 to contest the legislative elections, under the name NUPES (New Popular Union). The creation of the NFP was in response to Macron calling snap elections after the crashing defeat of his electoral list in the EU elections of 9 June 2024. In these elections Marine Le Pen's RN came first with 31.37% of the vote, while Macron's list (L'EE) won less than half of that, 14.60%. Macron attempted to move fast, immediately calling snap elections to take his opponents by surprise and make use of the usual "lesser evil" blackmail: "vote for me against

the extremists". The NFP, including the LFI, participated in a democratic front in the second round, withdrawing its own candidates and urging people to vote for Macron's candidates. Le Pen was indeed defeated in this way, the NFP won 178 seats, Macron's camp 162, and RN 142.

121. Macron refused to give the mandate to form a government to the NFP, despite its prevalence, by making use of his parliamentary numbers and his presidential bonapartist powers. He appointed a minority government of his own choice, under prime minister Michel Barnier, who comes from the traditional Right (Republicans) – with the support of Marine Le Pen. This led to mass demonstrations of hundreds of thousands in protests, called by the NFP. The Barnier government fell in early December due to an NFP no-confidence motion also voted by RN, to be replaced after a few weeks by a Bayrou government with the same political set-up. French instability will thus continue in the coming months, precipitating new elections in the next period or even early presidential elections.
122. Despite the "radical" face and "reputation" that LFI has, partly due to the attacks against it by the ruling class, it is not a Marxist organisation, it cannot even be described as an anticapitalist one. It does not describe itself as a party but as a "movement" and as a "network" and it does not aim at the overthrow of the capitalist system; it essentially wants to implement reforms to make it "better", more humane – the standard illusion of reformism. The parties it has aligned itself with in the NFP, particularly the SP, but also the PCF and the Greens, have been tested in previous times and have shown that they are not willing to enter any major confrontation with the French ruling class, to question the capitalist system in any way. Moreover, LFI reiterates the approach of the New Left parties, defending a supposed French social model, with no explicit reference to the role of the working class and with no reference to any class internationalism.
123. Apart from the political programme and physiognomy of LFI, there is another crucial deficiency, and that is the undemocratic character of LFI (and also of NFP). LFI is a top-down organisation, without any real control of the general political line or of Mélenchon, by the membership (estimated to around 400,000).
124. LFI in the last two years, precisely at the moment when the war in Ukraine has ushered in a new phase of inter-imperialist conflict, has proposed a tactic of broad alliances within the "progressive" front that, in both name and substance, explicitly recalls the Popular Front of the 1930s. The NLF as well as its predecessor, NUPES (Nouvelle Union Populaire Écologique et Sociale) include not only forces from the workers' movement that have previously shown they are unwilling to engage in a serious confrontation with the French ruling class (such as the PCF), but also forces that now fully align with the "progressive" bourgeois wing (the Greens and the PS). In doing so, LFI is theoretically and politically repeating the same mistakes made 90 years before. It's no coincidence that last September (2024) LFI voted in the European Parliament to approve the use of European weapons to target military objectives in Russia.
125. The political programme of the NFP (and of NUPE before that) includes demands like: the freezing of oil, gas and food prices; increased wages; fewer hours of work; lowering the retiring age; increasing taxes on the rich and on corporations; increased spending on welfare and social

services; abolishing nuclear power and fossil fuels; against racism and for the rights of migrants and refugees; support for women's and LGBTQ+ rights; revision of the constitution to abolish the president's extreme/bonapartist powers, etc. These demands raise the hostility of the French ruling class, which evidently consider Mélenchon much more unpredictable and dangerous than Marine Le Pen. Despite the –not particularly radical– reformist character of LFI's programme, it would be impossible to implement it within the framework of an interclass alliance and under capitalism, due to the fierce opposition of the French (and international) bourgeoisie.

126. Despite this strategy and despite its inability to offer an alternative direction to trade union struggles, such as the movement on pensions, LFI and NPF, in the present conjuncture, are seen by the masses as providing a perspective, both on the level of day-to-day struggles and protests and also politically to challenge the centre right government and the far right. As a result, LFI has very significant support in the French working class, the youth and the social movements.
127. The NFP was built on the basis of bringing together the “democratic/progressive” forces to oppose the Far Right from winning the government. But if the NFP was in a position to form a government itself, all its internal contradictions would come to the surface with explosive force. Faced with the determined opposition of the ruling class to the reforms it wants to get through, the NFP would have the choice of compromising (i.e. abandoning its programme) or collapsing. The NFP is thus an unstable formation.
128. The complexity of the current political dynamic, the general political weakness of the working class, the weakness of class-based and revolutionary forces, and the gap between mass consciousness and the reality of the Popular Front strategy, create a space for various political and electoral tactics in the next period – from providing the NFP with conditional electoral support to building an alternative front to the NFP.
129. The anticapitalist Left is split over the approach towards LFI. Big sections of the anticapitalist Left stand in opposition to LFI and especially NPF, but others provide support and/or join. The most sizeable anticapitalist group in France, NPA (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste – New Anticapitalist Party) split over this (and a number of other important issues) in December 2022. The split divided NPA in two, with about 700 members on each side, one joined the NPF, the other (NPA Revolutionnaire) refused to even call for a vote to it.
130. Beyond any political or electoral tactics, for Marxists, a principled political position against the creation of the French “popular front”, and more specifically for the inclusion of the SP in it, is necessary: historically, a popular front is a “strike breaking mechanism”, to use Trotsky's expression – and thus, it will create the conditions for the return of right-wing reaction. This criticism ought to be directed towards the LFI which was the key force behind it and for failing to draw the lessons of the failed experience of the Popular Front of the 1930s. The goal must always be to convince through patient explanation. Critical political action means fighting for the full implementation of the mass movement's demands adopted in the NFP's program, emphasizing that achieving this requires the full autonomy and political independence of the working class on a clear perspective of system change.

131. Within this framework, any tactic of conditional support or entryism is possible, aiming at building the Marxist forces and when possible, break the class-conciliationist dynamics of the Popular Front.

132. The mass sentiment calling for unity to counter the Far Right must neither be denied nor opposed. In a context,

"...where the world economic crisis is worsening; unemployment is growing; in almost every country international capital has gone over to a systematic offensive against the workers... there is a new mood among the workers – a spontaneous striving towards unity, which literally cannot be restrained... The new layers of politically inexperienced workers just coming into activity long to achieve the unification of all the workers' parties and even of all the workers' organisations in general, hoping in this way to strengthen opposition to the capitalist offensive" [Theses on the United Front, Executive Committee of the Comintern, December 18, 1921].

This general observation was true in the 1920s and 1930s, when the masses were organized in reformist parties and unions, and it remains true today, even though this kind of organisation does not exist.

"The united front tactic is simply an initiative whereby the Communists propose to join with all workers belonging to other parties and groups and all unaligned workers in a common struggle to defend the immediate, basic interests of the working class against the bourgeoisie".

The united front policy operates, therefore, within a mass and class dimension, involving all forces of the workers' movement and the left, in social action, and aiming to develop united organizational bases among the masses (strike committees, co-ordinations, self-organized assemblies, etc.). The united front tactic is an exact opposite of inter-class popular fronts.

133. Marxists in France would have a duty to raise this criticism to LFI, even though in a careful and sensitive way, given the support LFI/NPF have in the working class, the immigrants, the youth, etc. The aim should always be to convince through patient explanation. However, taking a principled position towards the NPF is different from the tactics to be followed towards LFI or the NPF. A certain orientation to these forces would be necessary because they attract (see below), big numbers of working-class and youth activists and supporters. The size, however, of a Marxist organisation is another important factor in deciding such tactics. For a very small revolutionary group, probably the best tactic would be to enter LFI – its structures allow this. But irrespective of the size and the practical tactical details, which cannot be decided from afar (as we have no organisation in France) and which should be a matter of open-minded discussion, the application of the "method" of the united front towards LFI, i.e., collaborating and working together with its rank-and-file activists would be necessary.

The Anticapitalist Left

France

134. There are countries in which the anticapitalist Left is playing an important role in the working class, and the social movements and a number of cases where it came close to the creation of sizeable new left formations, but in the end failed to significantly change the landscape of the Left.
135. One of the most important countries where organisations that have a reference to Trotsky played an important role in the past, is France. NPA, already mentioned, had raised the hopes of many activists at its creation, in February 2009, counting 9,200 members at its inception. The “far left” had played an important role in all the movements of the French workers and youth from the 1960s to the present day. In the presidential elections of 2002, the candidates of the Trotskyist Left received between themselves 10.44% of the total vote! In the 2007 elections they received 7% – significantly lower from 2002 but still big, indicative of the potential that existed objectively.
136. The initiative for the creation of NPA was taken by the largest of the Trotskyist organisations, LCR (Revolutionary Communist League) associated with the *United Secretariat of the Fourth International* (USFI). NPA was a broad formation aiming to bring together the fragmented French anticapitalist Left. The idea was correct, but it was applied in a wrong way. Following the tactics that characterize the USFI internationally, the LCR diluted itself in the NPA. This meant that they had abandoned the aim of having an organized revolutionary nucleus at the centre of NPA (as a broad formation). NPA, therefore, was bound to end up in adventures (opportunist or sectarian). LCR demanded that all groups that decided to join NPA ought to also liquidate themselves before joining. This is a crucial mistake, because it does not recognise the need for revolutionaries to be organised within broader left formations which, otherwise, would tend to be reformist, left reformist or centrist depending on circumstances, but certainly not revolutionary.
137. The rise of Mélenchon as a powerful left personality, building around him broad left alliances and standing in the presidential elections from 2012 onwards, immediately created divisions and splits in NPA because of the latter’s decision to stand on its own instead of seeing itself as part of an electoral agreement.
138. These divisions became even more acute around the presidential elections of April 2022. In the first round Macron came first with 27.85%, Marine Le Pen second with 23.15% and Jean-Luc Mélenchon third with 21.95% – i.e. Mélenchon lost to Le Pen by 1.2% and was thus out of the race of the 2nd round. The first round featured several left candidates, representing the Greens (Jadot, 4.63%), PCF (Roussel, 2.28%), PS (Hidalgo, 1.75%), as well as the Trotskyist candidates of NPA, F. Poutou, and of Loute Ouvrier (LO – Workers’ Struggle) N. Artaud. NPA and LO received 0.77% and 0.56% respectively, i.e., 1.33% in total. This is higher than the difference between Lepen and Melencon. Had the two Trotskyist organisations called for a vote for Mélenchon in the context of an electoral agreement the second round of the presidential elections would probably take place between Macron and Mélenchon, instead of Macron and Lepen. Mélenchon’s defeat led LFI in the direction of constructing the New Popular Front, primarily addressing its right, i.e., the Greens and

the PS. These conditions inevitably increased pressures inside NPA, which split before the end of the same year. Particularly so as its vote in consecutive presidential elections was steadily falling: 1.15% in 2012, 1.09% in 2017 and 0.76% in 2022.

139. There is a clear class characteristic in the vote for Mélenchon, as is clear, e.g., from the 2022 presidential elections. Mélenchon got spectacular results in a number of working-class suburbs of Paris: 49.09% in Seine-Saint-Denis, 64% in La Courneuve, 55.22% in Montreuil, 53.83% in Pantin, 61.13% in Saint-Denis, 54.20% in Villepinte, 60% in Gennevilliers, etc. Overall, Mélenchon came first in terms of votes, in five of the eight departments of the Ile-de-France region surrounding Paris! Mélenchon was also first in the French Antilles in the Caribbean, he got 56.16% in Guadeloupe, 53.1% in Martinique, etc. The same was true with those who identify themselves as Muslim, taking 70% of their votes! He also won a majority among those voting for the first time in their lives and (according to a poll) he got 38.4% of the vote among voters aged 18-24. This pattern was repeated in the general elections of 2024. There's a clear social dynamic around LFI and the method of the united front tactic towards it would be necessary, meaning the need to work together, build common campaigns, movements and local committees with its members.

Ireland

140. Ireland is exceptional in many ways. The two, semi mass new Left formations, with elected MPs, are linked to the Trotskyist space: the *Socialist Party*, coming from a CWI tradition (it split from CWI in 2021 and from the ISA in 2024) and the *People Before Profit*, coming from the British SWP tradition.
141. Ireland shows the potential. The SP in the past was able to lead great campaigns against water charges and against a tax on bin collections, among other, while some of its representatives were arrested and jailed because of the struggles they were leading. Thus, new militant class traditions were established. It remains to be seen if the SP and PBP will be able to sustain and increase their support in the next period.

Greece

142. In Greece, there is a strong presence of the anticapitalist Left, of all shades: Trotskyist, Stalinist, Maoist, and quite a number of a mixed or unclear character. The "Anticapitalist Left Alliance", ANTARSYA, has been in existence in one form or another for more than two decades. At its height in the first half of the 2010s it had around 2500 activists and it was able to receive in elections up to 1.2% of the vote. ANTARSYA has a radical, anticapitalist programme, but is also sectarian in refusing to apply the *united front* approach and political-electoral alliances with other forces in the labor movement. It refused to do so in the late 2000s and early 2010s towards SYRIZA, when the latter could still be described as a party of the Left, and it refuses to do so still today even towards the KKE, not to mention Diem 25. ANTARSYA has the conception, in essence, that the united front approach relates only to organisations of the "revolutionary space". It failed completely to utilize the crisis of Syriza after 2015 and as a result ended up in a big crisis itself, with repeated splits. At

the last general election (June 2023), it received 0.3% (less than 16,000 votes) with abstention at a record height of around 50%.

143. The majority of anticapitalist left organisations do not take part in ANTARSYA. The Greek section of ISp, Xekinima, does not take part in ANTARSYA essentially for one main reason: its sectarian rejection of the united front and broader alliances with other left forces. However, in the local elections of October 2023, the broad anticapitalist space was forced to get together in many municipalities (including the major ones, Athens and Salonica) on one electoral list. The reason for this was a new law by the ND government that imposed a threshold of 3% for any party to win seats in local councils. This was in addition to many other obstacles, e.g. in the big municipalities one would have to present lists of more than 100 candidates in order to be eligible to stand... The collaboration of the anticapitalist Left brought a result that can only be described as historic: it received around 6% in Athens and Salonica, no less than 4% in anyone of the 15 municipalities where the alliance stood, and in one case 9%. The lessons however have not been drawn, the anticapitalist space remains multi fractured. But these local election results show the potential and the importance of the method of the united front and the development of a common political-electoral space for the Greek anti-capitalist Left.

Conclusions

144. One of the main points that needs to be brought home is that while understanding the complications, what is even more important is to understand the possibilities that exist in the present situation. There is huge anger in society and a great potential for revolutionary ideas, but it is dispersed, because of the role of the parties of the New Left and shortcomings of the Anticapitalist Left. There is big potential for revolutionary ideas, but unfortunately the majority of the Anticapitalist Left is characterized by sectarianism, a lack of sufficient connection with the working classes, and a refusal to work together in common campaigns, electoral alliances, common initiatives, etc.
145. The experiences of the past years and decades have shown that the working class and the youth will move again and again in an effort to build political organisations that defend their interests. In the course of all the big crises and events of the past three decades the masses turned to small left organisations (e.g. SYRIZA) or created new ones from the scratch (e.g. Podemos) and gave them mass support so that they could take power. But the result was mass demoralization because all of the parties of the New Left reject the revolutionary road, having illusions in a “humane” capitalism, and as a result capitulate to the pressures of the ruling class.
146. Any new left formations, which do not have a strong Marxist cadre at their core, will inevitably develop in a reformist direction and end up in disappointing working-class people, thus laying the basis for the return of reaction in more repressive and authoritarian forms.
147. The huge rise of the FR in the last couple of decades is directly linked to the failure of the parties of the Left, old and new, to show a way forward in conditions of economic and social crisis.

148. A new generation of left parties is inevitable in the next period, though this could take time because of the weight of previous defeats and disappointments. Marxists need to follow such processes closely in order to try to intervene and instil revolutionary Marxist ideas in their ranks. There are countries in which the Anticapitalist Left has sufficient strength to take initiatives in the direction of building broader left formations if only it agrees to work together in this direction. There is significant potential in a number of countries, which could act as an example for more to follow, if only the anticapitalist left organisations abandon the sectarianism that characterises most of them.

149. Internationalist Standpoint will continue to work on three levels as it has been doing through its inception in 2022:

a) to strengthen our forces;

b) to work together with other organisations, linked to the workers and the youth, in the context of the united front, to fight together on specific issues or in specific campaigns;

c) to build new fighting organisations of the working class, or new left formations, either by taking part in them if other forces take the initiative, or by taking the initiative ourselves together with other groups of the anticapitalist space. These should function on the basis of internal democracy and with full independence to the constituent parts.

At the same time, it will aim at deepening its relations with other revolutionary international organisations.