

RENEWED SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR EUROPE

Roadmap to 2030

FRIENDS OF EUROPE AND THE RENEWED SOCIAL CONTRACT

Friends of Europe's work on the Renewed Social Contract is part of our long-term journey to revitalise the European Project.

It is based on our belief that a Renewed Social Contract based on peace, prosperity, inclusion and sustainability is a necessity for policymaking and thinking and will be the only way to succeed in the transitions ahead.

Our journey to renew Europe's social contract is dynamic and multifaceted. We continuously crowdsource ideas from our far-reaching community, relying on their collective intelligence and expertise to identify options for getting Europe through the challenges it faces today – and those that will only become more important to overcome in future.

In typical Friends of Europe style, we do not stop at experts, policymakers, thinkers and doers. We go a step further, looking to citizens to share their hopes, fears and ideas for the future of Europe and working to ensure that those ideas find their ways into policymakers' hands.

The objective of our work is as much about shifting mindsets and behaviours as it is about offering ideas. Identity politics, vulnerability and insecurity – together with a very changed world order to that of the last century – will shift and shape our shared future. Policymakers should be reminded to take these issues seriously and to act on them with a prevention mindset. Leaders must choose to think differently, to innovate and to move beyond the status quo, as the models and institutions drafted post-WWII will simply not see us through the years and transitions ahead. Rising to future challenges will require a move from 1950s to 2050s thinking.

Our work is, therefore, an earnest appeal to policymakers at all levels to stand up and have a more honest reflection about the challenges ahead of us. The ideas generated, which will guide our work through 2030, are open to criticism, debate, intellectual challenge and improvement. Our aim in this exercise is to generate the space to ask difficult questions and dare to craft bold answers.

WHY IT'S TIME TO RENEW EUROPE'S SOCIAL CONTRACT

Europe's 20th-century social contract was forged in an era of post-war European integration. Although it introduced ground-breaking concepts – such as welfarism, the social protection net, a new multilateral order to uphold and maintain peace, free flows of trade and global finance – times have changed, and mounting challenges and crises have brought societal concerns, confusion and frustrations to a breaking point.

There is a deepening sense of disenfranchisement and cynicism as people and communities increasingly feel overlooked in the policies, politicians and politics of now. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges ahead will be to balance necessary increases in defence spending with the social investments that are key to renewing Europe's social contract.

Created in very different times, post-war institutions, regulations and laws are no longer able to keep pace with the societies they are meant to serve. Macro trends – namely the digital, green and demographic transitions – define our times and demand new approaches to rise to the challenges of the age.

Underpinning these transitions is a shifting security environment, one which threatens broader societal resilience and influences both the transitions themselves and our ability to respond to them. The ability to make communities safer and more resilient is intimately intertwined with the geopolitical terrain.

This decade, Europeans have one more opportunity to head to the polls for European parliamentary elections, with a new European Commission mandate taking over soon thereafter. With national elections also taking place, now is the time for citizens, the private sector, civil society and public institutions to speak more to each other, and to find ways to radically rethink the ways in which they interact.

THE EVOLUTION OF OUR THINKING

We embarked on this journey years ago, as visible fractures in Europe's democratic and economic fabric became apparent. In 2018, our foresight-driven [#EuropeMatters](#) report introduced the concept of a renewed social contract, exploring key trends, drivers and uncertainties shaping Europe's future, and presented four possible scenarios for 2030 to stimulate debate among policymakers and citizens. At the time, we framed the social contract as a philosophical and political necessity: a way to re-establish trust between citizens and the European project at a time when institutional legitimacy was faltering and the dream of integration appeared to be slipping. We asked hard questions about the EU's relevance in a rapidly shifting global order, where traditional models of governance no longer seemed fit for purpose. We emphasised the role of tax as the fundamental contract-builder between governments, citizens and the private sector. Because tax – both in concept and in literal terms of revenue – is the glue that holds societies together and makes them work. Tax is not just an expenditure, it's a statement of intent and our vision of a society.

Building on that foundation, our 2019 report, [Vision for Europe](#), surveyed and engaged policymakers, thinkers and experts across all sectors, to devise a policy toolbox for governing institutions in Europe, aiming to reinvigorate the bond between EU institutions and the public by mapping choices and their consequences. We built on the urgency of the issue, proposing a more deliberate, structured reimagining of the social contract. We advocated for power-sharing, citizen engagement and institutional reform – not as idealistic gestures, but as pragmatic tools to make governance participatory and policy more responsive. We made the case that trust would only be regained by embedding citizens in the policymaking process.

In 2024, our reports [10 policy choices for a Renewed Social Contract for Europe](#) and [2024 voices: citizens speak up!](#) translated earlier conceptual dialogue into concrete policy proposals complemented by citizen-driven data insights – from accelerating carbon reduction and reforming EU fiscal strategy to engaging the private sector for social good. We emphasised that the social contract could no longer be an abstract goal but a political and institutional imperative, embedded in ideas of equity, redistribution and co-

production. We made an earnest appeal to shift mindsets and behaviours towards addressing social problems, offering actionable policy choices and a dataset of citizen sentiments to leaders.

The citizen dimension continued in 2025 with a follow-up report, [*Voices for choices: data for decisions that matter*](#), deep-diving into the experiences of young people across Europe and setting out a roadmap of timely, evidence-based insights for policymakers. And we continued to evolve our thinking on the 10 policy choices through our paper [*Europe's social contract: the stakes have never been higher*](#), which set out new and updated scenarios for where Europe may be headed based on latest data and developments within the frameworks of our 10 policy choices and foresight archetypes.

OBJECTIVES

Friends of Europe believes that a Renewed Social Contract offers a path towards the inclusive and fair transitions that are needed for Europe to play its part in the world and care for its citizens in the 21st century. Through our work we aim to:

- **Embed the Renewed Social Contract** into the work of the European institutions across key policy areas
- **Engage citizens**, providing them the opportunity to have their voices heard by policymakers across Europe and present policymakers with the opportunity to respond to citizen views and concerns
- **Develop and socialise a database of citizen** experiences to provide policymakers and practitioners with a robust evidence base for decision making
- **Activate a multistakeholder network** to support the concept of a Renewed Social Contract and to take action across different levels and regions

METHODOLOGY

Our work on the Renewed Social Contract represents the *fil rouge* of our work through 2030, with policy choices elaborated through an iterative consultative process aimed at refining the ideas and recommendations offered to policymakers.

We have created and now drive a constant feedback loop of dialogue between those who make policy and those who are affected by it, so that final outcomes are reflective of a more participatory, cooperative process.

The efforts are underpinned primarily by:

- **Focus Groups:** facilitated sessions conducted in national languages aimed at garnering citizen sentiments on themes related to the Renewed Social Contract and generating qualitative data to underpin the development of ideas and decision making. Focus Group outcomes feed into Friends of Europe's wider work to provide an evidence-base for discussion
- **Surveys and polls:** launched online and disseminated to a pan-European database of citizens and civil society actors, offering an opportunity to road test the ideas
- **Consultative groups:** consultive groupings of experts serve as an ongoing source of expertise to provide ongoing input and support to Friends of Europe in the development of policy choices
- **Outward-facing activities and publications:** through Friends of Europe's tried and tested formats, progress on the development of final policy choices can be shared with our network for further input or socialised with policymakers through concerted advocacy campaigns

KEY OUTCOMES AND MILESTONES

2018

Friends of Europe's foresight-driven [#EuropeMatters](#) report introduces the concept of a renewed social contract and presents four possible scenarios for 2030 to stimulate debate among policymakers and citizens.

2019

Friends of Europe's publication [Vision for Europe](#) surveys and engages policymakers, thinkers and experts to devise a policy toolbox for governing institutions in Europe.

2022

In 2022, the Renewed Social Contract became the *fil rouge* of Friends of Europe's work through 2030, with every activity in one way, shape or form connected to the ambition of designing a Renewed Social Contract for Europe.

Friends of Europe establishes its internal thinking on the Renewed Social Contract and ensures that it becomes the overarching narrative of the organisation's work through 2030.

State of Europe 2022 is the starting point for the definition of '10 policy choices for a Renewed Social Contract for Europe.'

To facilitate a new way of working, Friends of Europe develops its first formal monitoring & evaluation system, designed to bring the whole team onboard with a new way of working.

Friends of Europe releases [Activity Report 2022: Friends of Europe and the Renewed Social Contract](#).

2023

In a year dedicated to drafting an initial set of 10 policy choices to guide a new cohort of European decisionmakers, Friends of Europe engaged in a multi-sectoral, multidisciplinary approach to harvest and crowdsource ideas and thoughts on the key challenges facing Europe in the decades to come.

Friends of Europe engages in multistakeholder consultations with experts and professionals from 30+ countries in Europe and beyond over the course of the year and releases a working paper highlighting an initial set of policy choices for European leaders.

A coalition of likeminded local, national and European players is developed through the consultative process, establishing a bedrock of like-minded partners to work together on the initiative's further development.

Launch of Friends of Europe's **DRIVE Impact Initiative**, aiming to expand and deepen the global and European conversation on sustainable and inclusive development by reimagining investment, funding, collaboration and impact evaluation

Friends of Europe partners with the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU for State of Europe, on the occasion of which a working paper on the 10 policy choices is discussed and debated.

Debating Europe, Friends of Europe's citizen engagement platform, conducts a series of focus groups and surveys across 7 countries to gather qualitative data from 2,000+ citizens on themes key to Europe's future. The project is titled **2024 Voices – Citizens Speak Up!**

2024

With an initial set of policy choices in place and a database of citizen sentiments at the ready, Friends of Europe launched two flagship publications which were disseminated to policymakers before and after the year's European elections.

Launch of Friends of Europe's **Ukraine Initiative**, aimed at countering the 'fatigue narrative' and rallying support for Ukraine through a sustained campaign of multi-level engagement

Friends of Europe's monitoring & evaluation system is adapted to ensure progress towards and impact of its policy choices.

A series of hybrid high-level debates during the electoral campaign brings together European citizens with political party and private sector representatives to discuss the policy choices and citizen sentiments drawn out of the *2024 voices* report.

20-year anniversary of the accession of 10 new member states to the European Union

Adoption of the European Commission Political Guidelines (2024-2029)

US presidential elections and re-election of Donald Trump as US President

Launch of **10 policy choices for a Renewed Social Contract for Europe** and **2024 voices: citizens speak up!** in Strasbourg with cross-party support.

The Letta report sets out a way forward for completing the European Single Market.

European parliamentary elections

Following the European parliamentary elections in May 2024, Friends of Europe disseminates its flagship publications among the new European Parliament and Commission.

Adoption of the EU strategic agenda (2024-2029)

The Draghi report sets out a competitiveness strategy for Europe.

State of Europe is an occasion to reflect on the impact of the European elections on its policy choices, taking into account the priorities of the new EU Commission mandate.

The European Parliament approves the “Von der Leyen II” Commission. The College of Commissioners takes office on 1 December 2024.

2024 is the hottest year on record.

2025

As the 10 policy choices continued to guide Friends of Europe towards a renewed social contract, the organisation joined forces with the Jacques Delors Institute to launch the Jacques Delors Friends of Europe Foundation, building a unique pan-European independent think tank, advocacy, and citizen engagement group and communications powerhouse. State of Europe served as the official launch.

80th anniversary of the UN

Final year in which global emissions can peak if the 1.5 °C warming target is to remain a scientific possibility

Implementation of the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) (until 2027)

Adoption of the European Health Data Space (EHDS) regulation, improving cross-border access to EU health data

Evaluation year for WHO global targets for noncommunicable diseases

Member states update their national energy and climate plans, delayed from 2024.

The United States introduces far-reaching import duties, crashing global markets.

Launch of [Voices for choices: data for decisions that matter](#), a study diving into the experiences and expectations of young people aged 18 to 35 in Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Poland

European Young Leaders (EYL40) meet in Bucharest, after a tense election period, and take part in a foresight exercise to set out future scenarios which feed into Friends of Europe's annual social contract update.

World Health Organization (WHO) member states adopt the pandemic agreement.

NATO members commit to a new defence spending target of 5% of GDP by 2035.

Halfway point to achieving the EU's Digital Compass targets

4th International Conference on Financing for Development

The European Commission proposes the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034.

Launch of the **Jacques Delors Friends of Europe Foundation** on the occasion of State of Europe

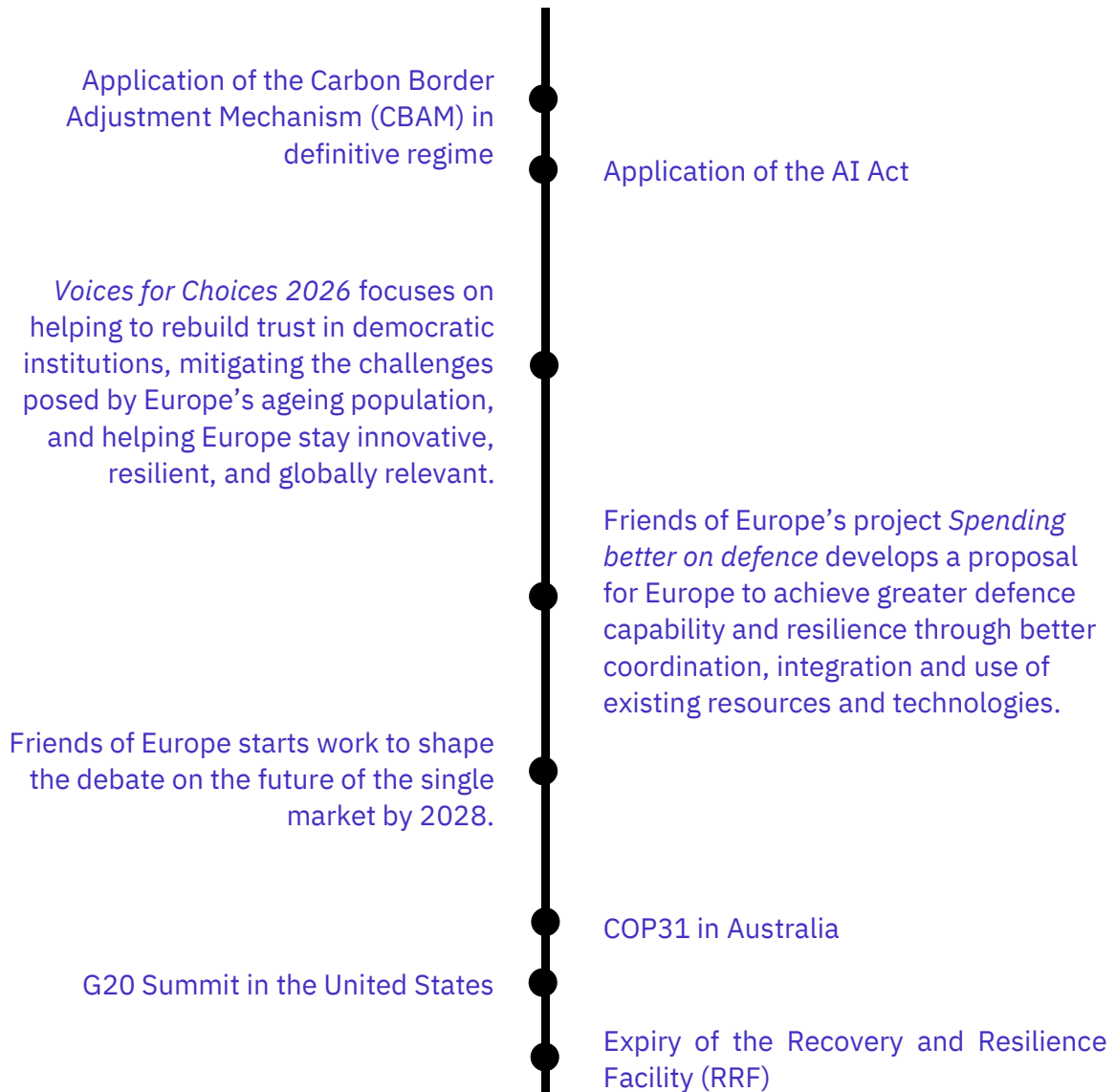
25th anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda

COP30 in Belém, Brazil - 10 years after the Paris Agreement

Friends of Europe releases **Europe's social contract: the stakes have never been higher**, setting out new and updated scenarios for where Europe may be headed based on foresight and latest data and developments

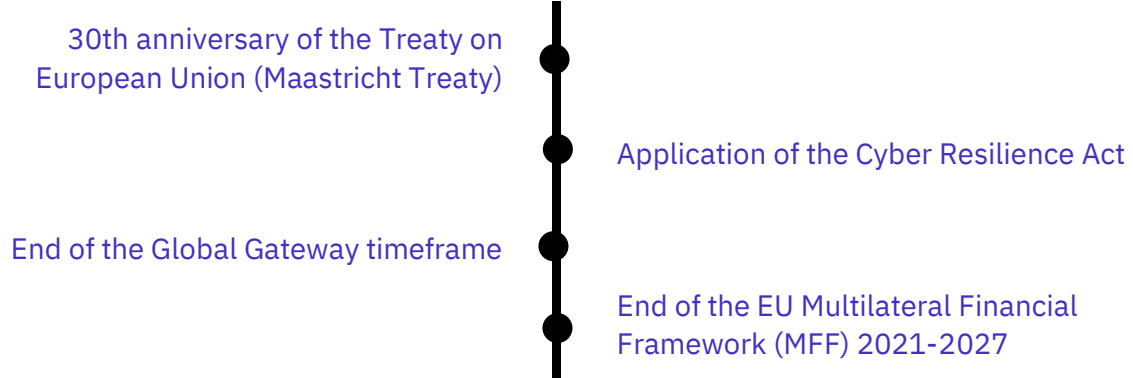
2026

Friends of Europe initiates new cross-cutting workstreams under the umbrella of the new Jacques Delors Friends of Europe Foundation. Projects focus on completing the single market, European defence spending and responding to the challenges of the demographic transition, while continuing to build upon the policy choices first published in 2024.



2027

Friends of Europe continues work to build upon the policy choices first published in 2024, with State of Europe continuing to stand as an annual evaluation moment to assess state of play and road test ideas with a high-level audience.



2028

A final set of policy choices is defined and elaborated on the basis of the previous years' consultations and launched on the occasion of the State of Europe high-level roundtable.



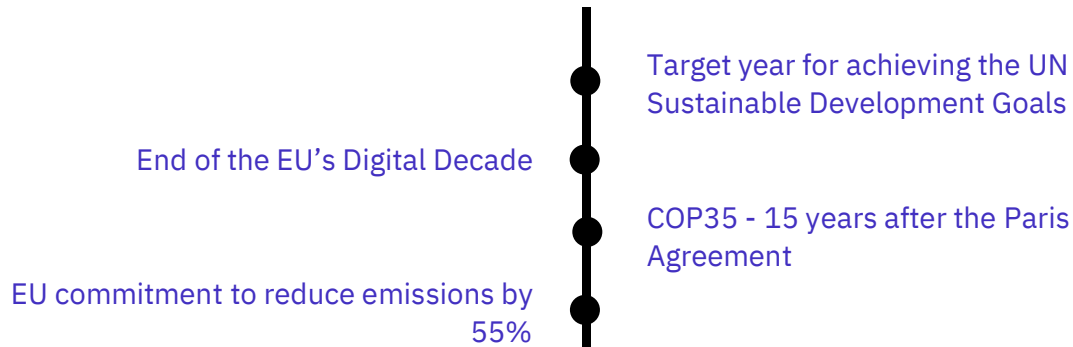
2029

In a year of European parliamentary elections, Friends of Europe will undertake a targeted campaign to socialise the final set of policy choices among the new European Parliament and European Commission



2030

As Friends of Europe continues to socialise its policy choices and advocate for their uptake, it will assess progress towards achieving its objectives through an evaluation exercise aimed at understanding how and where the Renewed Social Contract has gained momentum and what impact it has had.



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