

State of Europe 2022

The festival of politics and ideas

Autumn 2022



Making sense of transitions in an age of crises

A Renewed Social Contract for a new era

REPORT

In partnership with



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**Co-funded by the
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We offer Europe's citizens an opportunity to take an active, transformational role in shaping their environment. We use ground-breaking online brainstorming to bring different stakeholder groups together from all over the world and constantly innovate in how we convene and shape discussions. Through our debates, conferences, working groups, publications and recommendations, we provide bold and ambitious but practical solutions for a more inclusive, sustainable and forward-looking world.

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Executive summary

State of Europe, the festival of politics and ideas, delivered an unequivocal message on the need for the West to maintain support for Ukraine's resistance to Russian aggression, framing the conflict as part of an existential struggle between democracy and new forms of authoritarianism that recall the darkest days of Europe's 20th-century history.

Friends of Europe's flagship annual high-level roundtable, held on 27 October 2022 at Egmont Palace in Brussels, recognised that the hardship imposed on citizens across Europe by the economic impact of Russia's war – which comes on the heels of the financial and COVID-19 crises – has given added urgency to the need for a Renewed Social Contract.

That contract must define the role of government, business and civil society in reducing inequalities of opportunity, fighting climate change through an inclusive green and digital transformation, promoting new leadership, regenerating democracy and reframing Europe's role in the world.

With those priorities in mind, State of Europe brought together over 200 senior past-and-present officials from local, national and

international institutions, and leaders from business, technology, civil society, finance, diplomacy and the arts. The voices of European citizens and European Young Leaders (EYL40) were also heard.

The day-long meeting brainstormed the way forward and suggested recommendations that will feed into Friends of Europe's goal of developing a Renewed Social Contract by 2030, a journey that will start with the presentation of concrete policy choices to European and national institutions in the context of the 2024 European elections and appointment of a new European Commission.

In addition to the priority of thwarting Russia's war and building the Renewed Social Contract, topics included the state of globalisation and strategic autonomy in the new geopolitical landscape; boosting the resilience of digital society; rewiring health systems in the wake of COVID-19; and redefining an inclusive and sustainable model of economic growth.

Recommendations

Discussants at the State of Europe high-level roundtable identified recommendations in six policy areas that will be key to strengthening social justice and improving Europe's social contract. This year's edition of State of Europe was the starting point for the definition of policy choices that will be shared at the event next year. They will also feed into the policy recommendations that will be presented and socialised among European and national institutions in the context of the 2024 European elections and the onset of a new European Commission mandate.

Poverty and social inequality

Europe must assume the eradication of poverty and the fight against social inequality as a major target, which requires **the establishment of a multilevel governance structure that values the roles of regional and local authorities, and the engagement of stakeholders from the private and social economy sectors**. This approach could also boost a favourable framework for social innovation in the Union's response both to traditional responsibilities and new social challenges.

Welfare programmes must be oriented to promote upward social mobility, instead of contributing to the retention of people in poverty, and take advantage of the transformational power of education. Reinforcing the allocation of funds to finance anti-poverty and social measures may require the definition of new

sources of income, such as increased taxation on fossil fuels. Finally, the opportunity and strategic importance of broader use of social indicators in monitoring the effectiveness of EU policies will be essential.

Just transition

Sustainability and social transitions cannot succeed without a new natural, or eco-social, social contract and a new wellbeing or post-growth economy. **A natural social contract safeguards the rights of not only humans, but also nature**. Aligned closer with who we are as human beings, it can repair the relationship between humanity and nature. **This type of social contract is not only desirable in terms of sustainability, fairness, justice and equality, but it is also necessary to restore citizens' trust in government, companies and each other**. A natural social contract

provides a moral compass and a collective philosophy to which we – as citizens – can directly contribute.

Health

Health must hold a strong priority in the next European mandate. **The EU should focus on prevention, given the high risk of entering another health crisis and the current lack of preparedness.** Policy coherence between health and other fields, such as trade and agriculture, will be essential to mitigate negative health impacts and promote health and wellbeing. Health should have a place in all ministries.

The connection between health and care systems should be further developed to better reconcile disparate models of care. Linking health and long-term care budgets, as in Ireland, allows for more investment in prevention. Europe could improve sharing data and best practices to address complications, gaps and challenges.

The health labour market has experienced heightened levels of burnout since the beginning of the pandemic. **The education of all health workers, including both clinical and auxiliary staff, is critical to prepare workforces for the future.** Key areas of focus should be on digital and data skills; the equal treatment of healthcare workers; the ethics of recruitment; freedom of movement; and retention of workers.

Digital inclusion

Priority should be given to preventing digital exclusion, particularly of vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and migrants. One successful example is a Belgian initiative to place government officials in post offices to help citizens who struggle with online interactions with the state. Governments in Europe should focus on hiring more tech-savvy staff or increase investments to develop public servants' tech skills.

Education systems across Europe must be better streamlined and adapted to the new technical landscape. State schooling to ensure widespread literacy was only introduced 400 years after Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. Today, Europe needs to avoid a 'Gutenberg moment' – we cannot wait 400 years before mainstreaming digital education and inclusion.

Employment, skills and education

An immediate halt to unpaid internships must be complemented by upgraded European education systems to future-proof learning and include skills needed to drive the green and digital transitions, including cyber-security and life skills. Education must also be connected more directly to jobs market, and both the public and

private sectors should grant more recognition to informal and non-academic qualifications.

Although education is not an EU competency, there should be a supranational element to educational programmes that incentivise national authorities to meet objectives for developing skills in areas such as digital, green and cyber-security.

The role of the private sector, including both corporations and SMEs alike, should be to prevent having jobs without people and people without jobs.

regulation, as successfully introduced in Italy, has proven to improve enforcement and digital invoicing. Europe needs a level playing field in terms of corporate tax to avoid competition among members, which should eventually also be addressed at the global level.

Regulations should be tightened to make it more difficult for criminals, enablers and shell companies to avoid taxes, both in Europe and beyond. Sensitive applied carbon taxes are also an impactful type of behavioural taxation mechanism.

Leveraging taxation

The pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine War generated greater public understanding of the potential uses and benefits of tax revenues, including strengthened public trust.

Leveraging the power of digitalisation can simplify tax returns and payments, while increasing transparency. Improved

Introduction

Although Russia's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine rightly dominated discussions at this year's State of Europe – the festival of politics and ideas, the debate also marked a key step forward for Friends of Europe's core drive to define a Renewed Social Contract for Europe by 2030.

Discussants at Friends of Europe's high-level roundtable recognised the dramatic impact of Russia's war on living costs in Europe, which follows on fast from the COVID-19 pandemic and years of economic turmoil. **These crises have heightened the urgency of establishing a Renewed Social Contract** that can challenge inequalities of opportunity; bolster the green transformation and provide effective responses to the climate emergency; promote new leadership and regenerate democracy; and reframe Europe's role in the world.

Even before the pandemic and Russia's war, it was clear that Europe needed a new social contract to cope with fundamental shifts in economic, social and demographic conditions, combined with the looming threat of environmental catastrophe.

Post-Second World War social contract models are no longer fit for purpose in an era of global mobility; digitalisation and automation; the erosion of labour protection

through the growth of the informal sector and 'gig economy'; wage stagnation; rising prices for energy, food, healthcare, education and housing; and the impact of climate change and biodiversity loss. Many of these changes have hit people in the middle- and lower-income range particularly hard, fuelling the frustration and alienation that have damaged democracy through high abstention rates or growing support for populist demagogues who threaten to tear down a system that many voters feel is no longer working for them.

A Renewed Social Contract for Europe that defines new roles for the public and private sectors, civil society and individual citizens could halt this negative spiral by building the foundations for social, economic and environmental transition towards a stronger European democracy and stronger Europe in the world.

2022 has been a 'transition year' for Friends of Europe while it establishes its internal thinking on the Renewed Social Contract and ensures that it becomes the fill rouge of the organisation's work through 2030. That objective is no longer a separate initiative: every activity that Friends of Europe puts together from now on will be directly connected to the ambition of designing a Renewed Social Contract for Europe.

To that end, this year's edition of State of

Europe was the starting point for the definition of policy choices that will be shared at the event next year. They will also feed into the policy recommendations that will be presented and socialised among European and national institutions in the context of the 2024 European elections and the onset of a new European Commission mandate.

The ultimate objective is to prepare final recommendations ahead of the 2029 elections before concluding an overall stock-taking exercise to judge the impact in 2030.

STATE OF
EUROPE
2022
OCTOBER 27

BUILDING A BETTER SOCIETY WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE?



friends
of europe



1. **Ana Gomes**, Former Member of the European Parliament, Trustee of Friends of Europe; **Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic**, Former President of Croatia, Trustee of Friends of Europe
2. **Clara Ganslandt**, European Union Special Envoy for Arctic Matters, European External Action Service (EEAS)
3. **Caroline Walerud**, Co-Founder and Executive Chairwoman, AirForestry and Volumental, Sweden, 2022 EYL40; **Hera Hussain**, Founder of CHAYN, 2020-21 EYL40
4. **Jaap de Hoop Scheffer**, Chair, Clingendael - the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Minister of State, former NATO Secretary General and Dutch Foreign Minister, Trustee of Friends of Europe



Renewing Rousseau

Geopolitical tensions, feeding into yet another economic crisis and thwarting expectations of a smooth recovery from the pandemic, have added urgency to calls for a Renewed Social Contract that defines the role of government, business and society in controlling global warming, promoting sustainable and fair economic development and strengthening democracy.

“The world has turned upside down, in health terms, economics and now war on our doorstep,” said **Dharmendra Kanani**, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Spokesperson at Friends of Europe.

It is time to fundamentally rethink the role of politicians, governance and citizens. “A Renewed Social Contract can act as the policy lever and methodology for managing crises,” Kanani added. “It can also provide the social glue to build trust amongst citizens, governments and the private sector by redefining their roles, responsibilities and expectations in contributing to good society.”

The need for a rethink of democracy was underscored by **Ece Temelkuran**, Turkish novelist, political commentator and author of ‘How to Lose a Country: The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship’, who argued that we must talk about capitalism and redistribution of wealth in order to save democracy. She



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A Renewed Social Contract can act as the policy lever and methodology for managing crises.

Dharmendra Kanani, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Spokesperson at Friends of Europe

contended that the crisis of democracy is intertwined with that of capitalism and that democracy without true equality and social justice is theatrics in itself.

The award-winning author claimed that democratic forces and citizens today are quite insignificant and inconsequential when it comes to improving democracy. She urged the roundtable's discussants to use the small current opening to conduct a real conversation about democracy and think beyond capitalism – a system that kills the planet, people and human dignity.

Temelkuran lamented that elections in Europe have become a question of selecting the least-bad option. “For the past two decades, people have been using the ballot boxes just to choose the better of the worst. In Europe today, even in countries where the centre is still slightly holding, like France, for example, people are voting to stop Marine Le Pen. It's not like they are choosing someone, they are voting not to choose someone. This is the true crisis of democracy.”

To counter voter disillusionment and growing support for populists, mainstream parties need to reconnect with voter concerns by focusing on inequality, human dignity and social justice, Temelkuran concluded.

As a reminder of how successive and concurrent crises are impacting citizens across Europe, the high-level roundtable held a citizen-centric approach and began with deeply personal stories from citizens affected by climate change,



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For the past two decades, people have been using the ballot boxes just to choose the better of the worst. [...] It's not like they are choosing someone, they are voting not to choose someone. This is the true crisis of democracy.

Ece Temelkuran, Turkish novelist, political commentator and author of ‘How to Lose a Country: The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship’

the pandemic, economic contractions and war in Europe's neighbourhood.

"We joke that it is the end of the world, and then there is an awkward silence when we cannot look each other in the eye and admit how lost we feel," said a coordinator of the Justice is Everybody's Business campaign and Extinction Rebellion member **Anya Verkamp**, recalling conversations about climate change with friends.

Like many young people, Verkamp sees the risks of climate change as a disincentive to starting a family. "I would love our children too much to bring them somewhere so dangerous as a planet hurtling towards four degrees of warming." Since 1990, emissions by the lower and middle classes have declined, but emissions have risen among the richest 10% of Europeans. This imbalance of carbon emissions reflects the structural goal of the European Union to protect industry, unite markets and maintain economic growth.

Swedish artist **Francesca Vincentie** emphasised the role of arts and culture as an amplifier of citizens' voices and a method of strengthening good governance. She recollected how the coronavirus pandemic pushed her into depression by freezing cultural expression. "I felt my belief in myself and my art – my drive – gradually decline and it was really soul-crushing."

In a bid to recognise artists' expertise as essential, Vincentie appealed for more taxpayer funding for artists as a result of her personal experience: "In 2020, working in the creative



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Without innovation, we won't be able to put through all of these ambitions.

Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, and 2018 EYL40

sector went from tough to impossible [...] even as a European citizen, I didn't know where to turn for support."

Ice cream entrepreneur **Bassel Taylouni** shared a personal story of resilience, fleeing the war in Syria to set up his company in Belgium: "Home is not the country I was born in; home is something I have created for myself more than once."

Taylouni entreated European governments to remove barriers for refugees seeking to study, work or set up businesses, and to cut red tape that holds back innovation and enterprise in Belgium and Europe more generally. His story of battling bureaucracy and outdated administration allowed for an organic segue into the need for wholly inclusive digital and technological transitions.

The three citizens' interventions were welcomed by **Mariya Gabriel**, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, and 2018 EYL40, whose department focuses on climate, culture and innovation. Reassuring the Commission's commitment to "listen, engage and support", she insisted on the need to raise the visibility of existing cultural, education and cultural initiatives.

Gabriel would like to see a critical mass of people engaging with and offering criticism on these initiatives to move them forward constructively. Today, more than ever, Europe needs all the creativity that it can get to drive collective actions for greater inclusivity and equality, especially in times of fragility.



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We cannot talk about societal change without talking about affordability.

Sven Smit, Chair of the McKinsey Global Institute and Senior Partner at McKinsey & Company

Innovation is key to making progress, Gabriel acknowledged, and the Commission must ensure that it has tools in place to unleash Europe's innovative potential in terms of wealth creation and protection of the planet and European values.

"We need to rely more on science and innovation. Without innovation, we won't be able to put through all of these ambitions," concluded Gabriel. "We need to drive a human-centric digital transformation of our social interaction. We need to foster more societal awareness of the challenges ahead," alluding to eco-responsibility and the need to modernise Europe's democratic foundations.

As Europe moves towards targets for green and digital transition, innovation is essential to ensure those developments are inclusive, advised **Sven Smit**, Chair of the McKinsey Global Institute and

Senior Partner at McKinsey & Company.

If those transitions push up the price of energy, food, housing and other essentials – hitting the poorest hardest – there can be no Renewed Social Contract and Europe will face a revolt.

"We cannot talk about societal change without talking about affordability," Smit said. "[The] energy transition without affordability is not possible, housing is not possible. Energy is the most regressive tax that you can imagine [...] at the end of the day, the only way things get more affordable is innovation."

Europe must help promote that essential innovation, he added, by working to reduce market fragmentation, reduce bureaucracy, step up research and development (R&D) investment, tweak merger and acquisition (M&A) policy and encourage greater profitability.



Francesca Vincentie, Swedish artist; **Bassel Taylouni**, Belgian Syrian ice cream entrepreneur; **Anya Verkamp**, Coordinator of the Justice is Everyone's Business campaign



1. **Silja Markkula**, President, European Youth Forum (YFJ)
2. **Elsa Gayle Zekeng**, Founder SökerData, Co-Founder Northwest Biotech Initiative, Member of the Africa-Europe Foundation Youth Delegation, United Kingdom
3. **Gunilla Carlsson**, Member of the Board, African Venture Philanthropy Alliance (AVPA), Former Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation, High Level Group Member Africa-Europe Foundation



We are all Ukraine

The messages on Ukraine were emphatic. Each introductory discussant, one after the other, stressed the imperative of unflinching military, economic and political support. There was a particular focus on backing for Ukraine's civil society and free media, as well as stepping up investment both now and during the post-war reconstruction phase. Discussants were clear in recognising the wider implications of Russia's attack, which puts the future of democracy at stake across Europe and beyond.

"Ukrainians are fighting for our freedom and for our markets and our democracy and that's why it's so important," said **Mark Gitenstein**, United States Ambassador to the European Union. "In the answer to threats to democracy [...] it is critical that we do not flinch, we do not equivocate, we do not appease."

Noting that Ukraine's fight for democracy is critical for the EU, Gitenstein said it was essential to preserve unity within the Union and across the Atlantic.

To that end, politicians in the West have to convince citizens of the need to step up support for Ukraine, even in the face of economic hardship, and to counter Russian propaganda that could otherwise undermine confidence in democracy and underpin electoral successes for pro-Kremlin and authoritarian forces in Europe and the US.



“
Ukrainians are fighting for our
freedom and for our markets and
our democracy.”

Mark Gitenstein, United States
Ambassador to the European Union

Citizens face a stark choice, Gitenstein contended. “Do you want to live in Russia?” he asked. “If you don’t want to live in Russia, you are going to have to pay a little more for your gas, you’re going to suffer some inconvenience [...] that is the existential question you have to ask yourself. Our grandparents made the right decision 70 years ago, hopefully we will as well.”

Ukrainian First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Economy **Yulia Svyrydenko** appealed for Western private sector support for the Ukrainian economy, even while the war is still raging, assuring that investment now would pay off in the future. “It is essential that, in current times, war is not an embargo on investment,” she said dialling in from Kyiv. “A successful win will be a driver for economic growth in Ukraine and Europe for many, many years.”

Her words were backed up by **Taras Kachka**, Ukrainian Deputy Minister for the Economy, who joined in person. “International support, financial support and support for people is not a secondary tier of defence policy; it’s a core of defence policy,” he told the meeting. “Your support, financial [support], economic support, humanitarian support is a core defence; it shows we counteract them by living with dignity while being at war.”

Discussants also underlined the crucial role that Ukrainian civil society and businesses are playing in the resistance to Russian aggression by keeping essential services and connectivity going and improvising support for the military and war crimes investigators.



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War is not an embargo on investment.

Yulia Svyrydenko, Ukrainian First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Economy



Taras Kachka, Ukrainian Deputy Minister for the Economy

“Between the Ukrainian military and civil society, the distinction is so blurred. It’s a genuine national effort of resistance,” said Inna Shevchenko, Ukrainian activist and author, journalist at Charlie Hebdo and leader at FEMEN International. “This is a war of values, and no war of values can be won without civil society.”

Shevchenko too underscored the importance of continued international backing. “As long as the rest of the world supports Ukraine, Ukrainians will continue fighting and as long as Ukrainians are willing to fight, the rest of the world has to support Ukraine.”



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This is a war of values, and no war of values can be won without civil society.

Inna Shevchenko, Ukrainian activist and author, journalist at Charlie Hebdo and leader at FEMEN International



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1. **Laura Sullivan**, Executive Director, WeMove Europe
2. **Mariana Pinto Veiga**, Representative of the Debating Europe citizen panel on Globalization, European Citizen
3. **Francesca Cavallo**, Bestselling author of "Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls", Founder and CEO of Undercats Media, Italy, 2019 EYL40
4. **Mariya Gabriel**, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, 2018 EYL40; **Elsa Zekeng**, Founder SökerData, Co-Founder Northwest Biotech Initiative, Member of the Africa-Europe Foundation Youth Delegation



A short history of Ukrainian resilience

Backing from civil society and the private sector was crucial to the Ukrainian military's defeat of the first thrust of the Russian invasion and has underpinned the armed forces' continued success, agreed **James Appathurai**, NATO's Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges.

NATO allies have much to learn from Ukraine's whole-of-society approach to resistance and resilience. "The lessons learned from Ukraine are hugely important [...] defence is not just for diplomats and armed forces anymore," Appathurai said. "What Ukraine has shown us is what it means to fight for your values. [...] Ukraine's military capability and will is very clear."

Pointing to Ukraine's cyber-resilience, backed by the private sector and civil society, Appathurai noted examples such as crowd-sourced intelligence and analysis, commercially available satellite imagery, civilian software for facial recognition to locate Russian units and identify war criminals, as well as crowdfunding to buy weapons.

NATO's current priority is to "stockpile, stockpile, stockpile" to ensure the continued supply of arms and munitions to Ukraine.



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What Ukraine has shown us is what it means to fight for your values.

James Appathurai, NATO's Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges

Questioned about Ukraine's eventual integration into Western structures, Appathurai said its "case as a contributing member for European and Atlantic security is pretty much rock solid".

Despite the succession of statements backing Ukraine, **Erica Casajoana**, former deputy representative at the Government of Catalonia Delegation to the EU, said Europe must do more.

"The US provides more than double in financial and military aid to Ukraine than all of the EU combined. This is a great shame for Europe because this is our problem, it is our war, it is our security," she said. "I would like to apologise to the Ukrainians here."

Discussants warned that this imbalance posed future risks if US politicians began pointing to Europe's burden-sharing deficit as an argument to reduce American support for Kyiv.

Belarus must not be forgotten as democrats there continue to resist President Alexander Lukashenko's dictatorial, Kremlin-backed regime. **Veronica Tsepkalo**, Belarus opposition leader and Founder & Chair of the Belarus Women's Foundation, urged the EU to help Belarus' exiled civil society organise online elections.

"We need to embrace another approach, otherwise we are not going to achieve anything in our country," she said. "We would like to embrace parliamentarism as well because we are tired of dictatorship after 28 years [...] please be our example and don't leave us to



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We would like to embrace parliamentarism as well because we are tired of dictatorship after 28 years [...] please be our example and don't leave us to fight this alone. Please stay with us.

Veronica Tsepkalo, Belarus opposition leader and Founder & Chair of the Belarus Women's Foundation

fight this alone. Please stay with us.”

Warfare was unpacked comprehensively, including discussion concerning the role that free press plays in conflicts and democracies. Gitenstein argued that US and European support for free media should look beyond Ukraine to neighbouring countries in order to ensure that there are viable alternatives to Moscow-backed and other authoritarian voices. “We have to build media platforms,” he said. “We need to build business models [...] and we then have to build equity investments to prove to people that these are profitable ways to then make money.”

That theme was picked up by **Zanda Kalnina-Lukaševica**, Latvian Parliamentary State Secretary of Foreign Affairs and 2017 EYL40, who warned that media support was essential to counter incredibly high levels of Russian propaganda penetration, even within mainstream media in many Western countries. “We need to find a way to better support the independent journalists in Ukraine,” she said. “Without independent media, we cannot look into a bright future in Europe or in Ukraine.”

Tao Legene Thomsen, Grand Prix-winning Creative Director at VICE Media, gave one clear example of how business and civil society can help support Ukraine’s struggle. His work with the Back Up Ukraine initiative empowers citizens to make digital copies of Ukraine’s cultural heritage, now under threat from Russian bombers and looters.



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Without independent media, we cannot look into a bright future in Europe or in Ukraine.

Zanda Kalnina-Lukaševica, Latvian Parliamentary State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 2017 EYL40

“Destroying cultural heritage is the fastest way to erase national identity,” he cautioned. “Cultural heritage isn’t about museums and history books; it’s about the nation’s identity, it’s about its right to exist. That’s a crucial task and one that we needed to act on with incredible speed and scale.

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Cultural heritage isn’t about museums and history books; it’s about the nation’s identity, it’s about its right to exist.

Tao Legene Thomsen, Grand Prix-winning Creative Director at VICE Media



Tao Thomsen, Grand Prix-winning Creative Director at VICE Media presenting the **BackUp Ukraine Project**

The West vs the rest?

One State of Europe panel asked whether multilateralism can still stop the world from splitting into competing economic blocs.

“Universality of principles rules and values is collapsing – many different systems are competing for supremacy,” said **Bruno Mações**, author of ‘Geopolitics for the End Time’ and ‘Manifesto of Virtualism’ and former Portuguese Secretary of State for European affairs.

Discussants pondered the prospect that divisions within the World Trade Organization (WTO) could see China breaking off to form its own economic sphere with allies, leaving the West confined to its own sphere.

The division of the world into rival economic blocs with competing trade rules would lead to a 5% fall in global gross domestic product (GDP), warned **Angela Paolini Ellard**, Deputy Director-General of the WTO. However, that “conservative” estimate solely measures economic consequences and does not include the costs of having different systems relating to labour rights, environmental obligations or human rights.

“Economic multilateralism in the context of the WTO is a tremendous opportunity to have everyone at the table,” she explained. “It’s an opportunity to address problems, not just in



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Economic multilateralism in the context of the WTO is a tremendous opportunity to have everyone at the table.

Angela Paolini Ellard, Deputy Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO)

terms of setting the economic rules of the road; it's a way to deal with the problems of the global commons, the people.”

Amid global supply chain deficiencies and growing calls for ‘nearshoring’, there’s a need to set “resilient supply chains in an increasingly fragmented system”, noted Ellard.

Concerns over supply chains and the vulnerability of Western nations to import dependence were also picked up by **Terhi Lehtonen**, Finnish State Secretary for the Environment. “This year has been a political earthquake and a rude awakening of our dependence on Russia and fossil fuels, and on countries that don’t share the same values or respect international rules,” she said. “Maybe industry needs to do more due diligence on its supply chains?” Ellard agreed that “corporate accountability has to be a part of this”, noting that “the EU cannot do it alone”.

However, although business can ‘play a role’, the EU has to take steps to protect itself in the turbulent economic and geopolitical context, particularly given the risk of renewed tensions in the transatlantic relationship. “We need to start thinking about joint strategic autonomy of democracies to increase our resilience, as well as how we invest,” said **Marek Havrda**, Czech Deputy Minister for European Affairs. “How do we Trump-proof the future?”

On European and Chinese cooperation in the business domain, *Financial Times* First EU-China Correspondent **Yuan Yang** suggested the separation of values and politics with economics and trade is no longer viable.



“
Maybe industry needs to do
more due diligence on its supply
chains?”

Terhi Lehtonen, Finnish State Secretary for
the Environment



Hélène Conway-Mouret, Member, Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and the Armed Forces, France; **Malcom Byrne**, Senator, Seanad Éireann, Ireland, 2012 EYL40

French and Irish Senators **Hélène Conway-Mouret** and **Malcom Byrne**, who is also a 2012 EYL40, both reacted by claiming Europe should build on the current system – which works – as opposed to calling for a wholistic system overhaul. Byrne urged it is not so much about saving democracy as defending European values.

The debate evolved towards the broader question of where power lies in democracies between citizens, governments and the private sector. This question, at the centre of the Renewed Social Contract, fed into discussions about the role of Europe on the global scene as a value-setter and produced a number of policy recommendations on geopolitical issues.

These included greater EU focus on the Black Sea region and more efforts to persuade Turkey to 'get off the fence' concerning Russia's war; reduced reliance on Chinese supply chains, even if this means pain for Western companies; a strengthened Europe-Africa relationship beyond the donor-recipient level, particularly through private-sector investment in African digitalisation; cooperation with the US and other partners on the future of the Arctic, plus greater engagement with native and resident populations on exploitation of the High North's economic potential; and greater US-EU coordination on energy diversity, particularly liquified national gas (LNG), central bank action in fighting inflation and the Trade and Technology Council (TTC).



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1. **Isabelle Durant**, Former Deputy Secretary-General, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Former Deputy Prime Minister of Belgium, Trustee of Friends of Europe
2. **Jamie Shea**, Senior Fellow for Peace, Security and Defense, Friends of Europe, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
3. **Yuan Yang**, First Europe-China Correspondent, Financial Times, Co-founder of Rethinking Economics International
4. **Nicolas Brien**, Chairman, European Startup Network, France, 2022 EYL40
5. **Valery Vermeulen**, Electronic music producer, Author, Guest Professor, University of Antwerp



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Profit for all

The idea that equality and welfare are incompatible with business profitability and growth is nonsense, argued **Nadia Calviño**, Spanish Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation, in a session that examined models for inclusive and sustainable growth.

“I would like to start by killing the discussion that there will be a trade-off between growth and distribution of welfare or wealth,” she said. “More and more economists are realising the two have to go hand in hand: you cannot have sustainable growth if you don’t reduce inequalities.”

Spain’s Socialist-led government is pushing for sustainable growth, Calviño explained, based on environmental, economic, financial and social policies rooted in three principles – fiscal responsibility, social justice and structural reform – which enable ministers to deal “with what’s urgent, without losing sight of what’s important”.

From the private sector, **Wouter Vermeulen**, Senior Director for Sustainability at the Coca-Cola Company, agreed there is no contradiction between profit and social good, but recognised that companies should go further by taking steps to advance social and environmental progress at a time of unprecedented disruption.



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You cannot have sustainable growth if you don’t reduce inequalities.”

Nadia Calviño, Spanish Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation

“The role of the private sector is for sure to create profit, but that’s not the end of the story,” he said. “We should be focused on creating value: value for our business in monetary terms, value for our customers, value for our communities.”

As examples, he pointed to Coca-Cola’s efforts to train refugees with new skills or encourage customers to recycle. Companies should work with European authorities to promote the idea of a just transition among consumers, Vermeulen added.

“None of this will be successful if society is not buying into the notion of the importance of climate change and an inclusive, just transition,” he said. “We will not be successful in a just transition and net-zero future if we don’t bring society along and we don’t rebuild trust.”

Rather than allow the Russian invasion to distract from Europe’s green and digital transitions, the war has added urgency to the need for change that can reduce dependence on fossil fuels, develop new technologies and enhance Europe’s economic resilience.

“It is not just a climate problem, it is a survival problem,” stated **Elisa Ferreira**, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reform. “We cannot delegate production to China, defence to the United States and energy to Russia and then expect to have the capacity to resolve a crisis.”

Russia’s aggression needs to be a catalyst for change, agreed **Ricardo Mourinho Félix**, Vice-President of the European Investment



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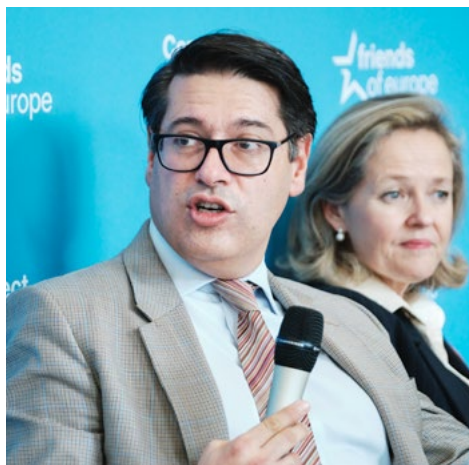
We will not be successful in a just transition and net-zero future if we don’t bring society along and we don’t rebuild trust.

Wouter Vermeulen, Senior Director for Sustainability at the Coca-Cola Company

Bank. “We need to invest today. We need to invest in renewable energy. This war just makes something that was important into an emergency,” he said. “We need to do the transition faster, while at the same time doing a just transition – a transition that cares for people and that cares for those that are most affected.”

Diversifying energy supply, expanding renewables and improving energy efficiency are essential in order to break reliance on “countries that use energy supply and food supply as weapons of massive destruction”. The democratic world, the free world, cannot be exposed to that,” Mourinho insisted.

The way forward, Ferreira said, is to make full use of the EU’s single market to “foster growth that is inclusive but also environmentally sensitive, energy sensitive and that uses the new technologies, innovation [and] digital capabilities that we have developed”



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We need to do the transition faster, while at the same time doing a just transition.

Ricardo Mourinho Félix, Vice-President of the European Investment Bank



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We cannot delegate production to China, defence to the United States and energy to Russia and then expect to have the capacity to resolve a crisis.

Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reform

Playing digital catch up

Discussants agreed that digitalisation has created huge advantages and opportunities for society, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, its longer-term future depends on policymakers having the necessary expertise to regulate it appropriately, particularly in the areas of investment and security.

“Digitalisation works, and we have many proof points across countries and sectors that we have the benefits from digitalisation,” said **Murielle Lorilloux**, EU Cluster and Enterprise Americas & Asia Pacific Director at Vodafone Business. During the pandemic, countries already advanced in digitalisation “were coping better and went faster out of the crisis”, she noted.

One example is Finland. Its State Secretary for Transport and Communications **Pilvi Torsti** described how 84% of the country is linked to 5G services and mobile phones are used by 99% of the population, with 75% using them for banking. “We have seen that our society was resilient both in terms of infrastructure and people,” she said. “We need to do things differently in the digital era.”

Echoing complaints that policy barriers, bureaucracy and a “very fragmented ICT sector” are delaying 5G deployment and increasing costs, Lorilloux criticised the EU for “lagging behind on connectivity” and called on EU countries to accelerate critical infrastructure rollout.



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We need to do things differently in the digital era.

Pilvi Torsti, Finnish State Secretary for Transport and Communications

On its current trajectory, Europe will be ten years behind the US and China in reaching 60% 5G coverage, she warned. “We need to catch up; this is our top priority,” she said, urging governments to put digital at the heart of policymaking. “We need to understand that digitalisation will impact all society and all sectors.”

Christophe Allemand, Strategic Programme Manager for Space Systems for Secure and Resilient connectivity at the European Space Agency (ESA), replaced his director Elodie Viau, Director for Telecommunications and Integrated Applications. Allemand offered the perspective of satellites and space-based technology acting as a “complement to a terrestrial solution” in enhancing resilience of (tele-) communication systems.

“What we are talking about now is how to tackle instability and insecurity.” In addition to terrestrial solutions, Allemand called for a second pillar in addition to terrestrial solutions – the space pillar – to increase critical infrastructure resilience. As he puts it and as demonstrated in the news this year, it is still far easier “to cut an internet backbone in the ocean floor than to destroy a satellite.”

Annelies Verstichel, Diplomatic Advisor to Petra De Sutter, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Public Administration, Public Enterprises, Telecommunication and Postal Services, underlined the importance of inclusiveness in the digital transition.

“If you want everyone to participate in digital acceleration, you need access to internet and digital literacy,” she said. “It’s about connectivity. If you’re not part of it, you’re outside society.”



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We need to understand that digitalisation will impact all society and all sectors.

Murielle Lorilloux, EU Cluster and Enterprise Americas & Asia Pacific Director at Vodafone Business

She referenced a study showing 40% of Belgians are at risk of digital exclusion and 10% of homes lack fast internet access. The government is investing significantly to close the digital gap and increase digital literacy, she said.

Discussants noted the challenges for policymakers in regulating the fast-moving digital agenda. Verstichel referenced a “tsunami of legislation” on data and artificial intelligence.

“It is impossible to keep up with the speed,” acknowledged **Byrne**. The situation is complicated by intense lobbying by industry and campaigners.

Byrne called for global standards to be set in the early stages of product development. “We need to start at the design stage and guard against how [standards] might be misused,” he said, suggesting the creation of a “Geneva convention for cyberspace”, since the United Nations “hasn’t been able to grasp the technology issues”.

Another area where more European investment is vital both for the green transition and for economic development is railways. “It is essential that, if we are able to deal with the challenge of climate change, we all have to drive and fly less and take the train more,” stated **Jon Worth**, Political blogger, #CrossBorderRail Project, 2012 EYL40.

However, while domestic rail networks within EU countries work comparatively well, “everything becomes more complicated once you cross a border,” he noted.

Worth produced a list of 20 cheap, quick and easy projects where EU investment could unblock



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We’re supposed to live in a borderless Europe, but when it comes to railways, borders very much still exist.

Jon Worth, political blogger,
#CrossBorderRail project and 2012 EYL40

cross-border rail crossings by upgrading existing infrastructure or fixing ticketing and timetable issues. “We’re supposed to live in a borderless Europe, but when it comes to railways, borders very much still exist,” he concluded.





1. **Tamara Srzentić**, former Minister for Public Administration, Digital Society and Media, Montenegro, 2022 EYL40
2. **Pascal Lamy**, President of the Paris Peace Forum, Honorary President of Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, Trustee of Friends of Europe, High Level Group Member Africa-Europe Foundation; **Patrick Huntjens**, Author and Professor, Ambassador of the Global Research and Action Network for a New Eco-Social Contract, Maastricht University and InHolland University School of Business and Economics
3. **Mary Fitzgerald**, Journalist and Researcher in Mediterranean Affairs and Libya, France, 2013 EYL40; **Veronica Tsepkalo**; **Anna König Jerlmyr**, former Mayor, City of Stockholm, Trustee of Friends of Europe; **Gunilla Carlsson**, Member of the Board, African Venture Philanthropy Alliance (AVPA), Former Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation, High Level Group Member Africa-Europe Foundation
4. **Luca Mapelli**, Representative of the Debating Europe citizen panel on Modern Warfare, European Citizen

Health in the permacrisis era

The application of digital to the health sector leapt forward during the pandemic, and the identification of health as a strategic sector opens the door to new financial investment and greater interlinkage within Europe for health services and supplies.

One State of Europe panel looked at health as a building block in the new vision of European economies and societies as the green and digital transitions gather pace. With new advances starting to impact on the sector, from quantum computing and advanced home monitoring to genomics and digital twins, discussants assessed the need for a rewiring or revolutionising in health systems.

In the era of permacrisis, health is clearly crucial to building societal resilience.

“We identify the healthcare sector as a strategic sector that can help the society also when crises and quick changes – for example due to health, climate or war – are happening,” explained **Morten Elbaek Petersen**, Director of Danish National eHealth Portal, sundhed.dk. “We must keep exchanging knowledge and experience to have a more resilient and more coherent European health system in the years to come.”

He outlined Denmark’s inclusive, user-centric approach to data, which involves government and business coming together to give citizens



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We must keep exchanging knowledge and experience to have a more resilient and more coherent European health system in the years to come.

Morten Elbaek Petersen, Director of Danish National eHealth Portal, sundhed.dk

access to their personal information and other healthcare data. “We need a strong private sector, but we also need a political leadership to tell hospitals to make the data available.”

Tamsin Rose, Senior Fellow for Health at Friends of Europe, concurred that the private sector has to make data available to citizens. “You can’t have a private provider saying, ‘it’s my data’; it may have come from all of you and you may have paid for the devices to collect the data, but that data ours!”

More widely, **Jean-Luc Lemerrier**, Corporate Vice President for Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Canada, Latin America, Japan and Asia-Pacific at Edwards Lifesciences, said healthcare systems have to move faster to adopt new technologies. That can help fix many of the capacity shortfalls that have seen waiting lists, shortages and suspended services in hospitals across much of Europe in the aftermath of the pandemic.

“These technologies need to contribute to fix the problem of shortage,” he said. “When you design them, they need to incorporate a component which is to say the patient shouldn’t have to stay too long in the hospital.”

Technology, however, won’t solve all of the problems. Public authorities need to do more to valorise healthcare careers, offering better remuneration, conditions and status, argued **Dana van den Hurk**, the representative of a citizens’ panel on health organised by Debating Europe, the citizens platform of Friends of Europe.



Jean-Luc Lemerrier, Corporate Vice President of EMEA, Canada, Latin America, Japan and Asia Pacific, Edwards Lifesciences

More attention also needs to be paid to underlying factors affecting health. “Human health isn’t just affected by health systems but by socio-economic status, by gender equality [...] and now we’ve got concerns around climate change,” said Rose. “How do health systems address the double or triple burden of these other environmental things that affect health?”

Fabienne Bartoli, Director General of France’s Haute Autorité de Santé (HAS), explained how France is working on that nexus between health, climate and social conditions. “The action for the environment, for health and against social inequalities have an impact on each other and call for a multisectoral vision,” she said. “France is committed to this dual approach of reducing global warming [...] to improve the health of the planet and the health of living beings.” She urged greater European cooperation to boost resilience to cross-border health challenges, such as antibiotic resistance.

A holistic approach also needs to focus on prevention, in both mental and physical health, even if that is less immediately profitable for the pharmaceutical sector than finding treatments and cures. “Prevention is a big topic that we often forget,” said **van den Hurk**. “We should stimulate a climate which is more beneficial for prevention, so we pursue meaningful health instead of financial gains.”

Several discussants also stressed the importance of an inclusive approach to healthcare that encompasses vulnerable groups. Women, for example, are often a



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The action for the environment, for health and against social inequalities have an impact on each other and call for a multisectoral vision.

Fabienne Bartoli, Director General of France’s Haute Autorité de Santé (HAS)

“forgotten group” in health, van den Hurk noted, particularly in research and data analysis.

More broadly, **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** called for a change in mindsets to break down barriers to gender equality. “Changing laws that have excluded women and creating policies that include woman and utilising best practices in work environments are all important for creating change, but I’ve always believed that culture should be given primacy, not because it is more

important than policy or law, but because it is the most complex, the most layered and the most difficult to change,” she said. “We can change laws and policies, but if we do not change mindsets, nothing really changes.”

Practical steps to bring about that change could range from employment quotas for women, improved male education, better data collection and a wider debate to remove the stigma of domestic violence, Ngozi Adichie suggested.

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We can change laws and policies, but if we do not change mindsets, nothing really changes.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Award-winning Nigerian novelist and writer, author of ‘Americanah’, ‘Purple Hibiscus’ and ‘We Should all be Feminists’





1. **Dana van den Hurk**, Representative of the Debating Europe citizen panel on Health, European Citizen; **Bassel Taylouni**, Belgian Syrian ice cream entrepreneur, European Citizen
2. **Xavier Damman**, Regens Unite Co-Founder & CEO OpenCollective, European Young Leader 2017 EYL40
- Sophie Bogaerts**,
3. Representative of the Debating Europe citizen panel on Digitalization, European Citizen



Conclusion

The 2022 State of Europe – festival of politics and ideas sent a clear message of support for Ukraine’s resistance to Russian aggression. Framing Ukraine’s struggle as a fight to protect democracy across Europe and the wider world, a chorus of voices declared that Western support should be maintained for as long as it takes to achieve a Ukrainian victory.

At the same time, discussants recognised that **the cost-of-living crisis triggered by Russia’s attack on Ukraine has added urgency to Friends of Europe’s drive to define a Renewed Social Contract for Europe by 2030.**

“Seventy percent of the population in Europe will be worrying this Christmas as to what they will do to make ends meet and I think it behooves us to really think deeply about [...] how do we rebuild and renew the societies that we’ve been living in,” concluded Kanani. “It is time to really, fundamentally shake the tin and think deeply about the roles of politicians, governance, the private sector [and] civil society.”

The roundtable pushed forward Friends of Europe’s Renewed Social Contract project, the next milestone of which is to prepare and present policy choices at the 2023 State of Europe and then share these with European



and member state institutions in the run-up to the European Parliament elections and appointment of a new European Commission in 2024.

That Renewed Social Contract must provide an adequate response to the social, economic, environmental and demographic challenges that have emerged over the past decades of economic crisis, political uncertainty, climate emergency, pandemic and now war in Europe.

It needs to be inclusive, taking into account the whole of society, recognising changes in

gender roles, promoting social mobility, fighting all forms of discrimination, highlighting the role of migrants and minorities, breaking down generational divisions, reaching out to countries beyond Europe and giving full priority to the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss.

A Renewed Social Contract that responds to key changes and challenges will be key to building a resilient society and a democracy sufficiently robust to withstand current threats and transition beyond the current age of crises to a brighter European future.





1. **Kirsten van den Hul**, Director, DutchCulture, The Netherlands, 2013 EYL40; **Jamila Aanzi**, Member of the Appeal Advisory Committee on Childcare Allowance, Ministry of Finance, The Netherlands, 2014 EYL40; **Lindsey Nefesh-Clarke**, Founder & Managing Director, Women's Worldwide Web (W4), France, 2012 EYL40; **Mary Fitzgerald**, Journalist and Researcher in Mediterranean Affairs and Libya, 2013 EYL40

2. **Ricardo Rio**, Winner of the 2021 World Mayor Sustainability Award and Mayor, City of Braga, Portugal

3. **Lindsey Nefesh-Clarke**, Founder & Managing Director, Women's Worldwide Web (W4), France, 2012 EYL40

4. **Thomas Gerassimos**, European Commission Director-General for Taxation and Customs Union





President's Gala dinner

On the eve of State of Europe, Count Etienne Davignon, President of Friends of Europe, hosted several hundred high-level guests to the President's Gala Dinner — an informal, yet intellectually stimulating and entertaining opportunity in which guests connected ahead of the State of Europe high-level roundtable, the next day.

This year, the theme of our President's Gala Dinner was 'Womanity' in a Renewed Social Contract. 'Womanity' is our cue to redefine what it means to be a woman, a human, and a citizen of Europe and the world.

Friends of Europe was delighted to welcome on this occasion Ece Temelkuran, award-winning Turkish novelist and political commentator ('How to Lose a Country: The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship', 'Together: 10 Choices for a Better Now') and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Award-winning Nigerian novelist and writer, author of 'Americanah', 'Purple Hibiscus' and 'We Should all be Feminists'.



Ece Temelkuran

Award-winning Turkish novelist, political commentator and author of 'How to Lose a Country: the 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship' and 'Together: 10 Choices for a Better Now'

Since 2016, I started my new career as Cassandra. I'm going around Europe and the United States and telling people that Fascism is coming. I'm from Turkey, so people think that I'm talking about my country, my crazy country, whereas actually, I'm talking about their country. The Netherlands, Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, Italy.

For six years, I was depressing, beautiful audiences like yourselves. Meanwhile, the New York Times and similar media outlets, were publishing these articles. And the most popular title of these articles was a quote from Game of Thrones, "The winter is coming".

For six years, I told them, "You know nothing, Jon Snow".

That winter has arrived.

Finally, we see Italy, Sweden, run by people who are not very shy of calling themselves – well they don't call themselves fascists, but I do, and I see no problem with that.

And, neither in Paris nor in Washington, the center holds very tightly.

I spoke about this for six years. Not many people have listened. But when I depress the audience like yourselves, and when I convinced them there is the danger of fascism, the question that kept popping up was the same.

Is there a hope?

I hate the word hope.

It is a fragile word. It's featherlike.

It has a paralyzing effect, I think. It makes us think of hopelessness right away. When somebody asks, "is there hope," you know there is a hopeless situation.

It is also quite inconsequential. Because what if I told you today, there is no hope?

What would you do differently tomorrow?

Or, what if I told you there is hope?

What would you do differently tomorrow?

I think hope is far more inconsequential than we think.

I'd rather use the word faith, faith in humankind. For obvious reason this word sounds very religious. But what I mean by faith is a secular faith. In our kind.

And I do think that it is not hope we lost, but faith.

This is the second time in modern history that we ask the same dangerous question:

Is humankind evil?

The first time the question came with boots and uniforms. This time around, it comes with this

maddening shitstorm about vaccine, about scientific data on climate change. It comes with war on women, a global war on women. It comes with the demand of the masses for authoritarian, extreme right, racist leaders. And we ask the same question again. Is human evil?

This is a dangerous question, but the first time it was asked, some very important beautiful people came about like Hannah Arendt, Adorno, Freud, Erich Fromm. They all wanted to prove that human is not evil. That it is inclined - that our kind is inherently inclined towards creating beauty.

Unfortunately, today, when we ask the question, it's not easy to convince people that humans are inherently inclined to creating beauty. What we are going through feels like this movie nowadays showing in the theaters. The movie is called "Everything, Everywhere, All at Once".

We are going through some times, some interesting times.

Not because what we are witnessing, but also because of the lack of faith in our democracies, in ourselves, and in other people. This is important not only because of our emotional states, but because Fascism is the total lack of faith in humankind.

That is where Fascism begins.

After saying all this, I have to remind you that what we are witnessing today and what we are inspired by is not because of hope. But it's because of faith. I'm imagining this young woman in Iran, who is going out on the street without a headscarf.

Is she doing it because there is hope? I don't think so.

She's doing it because she believes in humans, because she believes that there will be another one who is going to follow her. She believes in humans, and their sense of justice, and their need for freedom.

There is a global war on women. But also, there is a global resistance against Fascism, led by women.

from Chile to Hungary, from Poland to Istanbul. They are at the frontlines of protecting the beautiful, the urge - our urge - to create beauty.

They are proving that humankind is inherently inclined towards beauty.

Women. They have always been the canaries in the mind when it comes to Fascism. Because Fascism, in its very essence is the fear of female. And when I say female, I don't mean women. Because as you know, gentleman, 50% of you is also female.

When I say female, I feel - I mean - nature. I mean all the colourful things. I mean all the irregular things. And I mean laughter. Fascism is afraid of this. And, in order not to be afraid of Fascism, we have to choose to believe in women, because as they did throughout human history, they are going to be leading the way towards better days, and we're going to have those better days.

This winter will be over.



Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Award-winning Nigerian novelist and writer, author of 'Americanah', 'Purple Hibiscus' and 'We Should all be Feminists'

I flew in from Washington, D.C. this morning. And because I travel on a Nigerian passport, I've learned to approach immigration officials with a certain level of trepidation.

There have been so many instances of my being asked what I do. And when I say I'm a writer, my then been assumed to be lying. Because I think that for many immigration officers in Europe, Nigerians cannot possibly be writers. But I have to say that I did approach the officer at the airport here in Brussels today, with trepidation. And I am happy to announce that it all went well. Relatively. But the line at the Brussels airport has to be the most inefficient thing I've ever seen. If anybody here is in charge of the airport, just work on it, please, people, better working conditions.

I want to start by telling you about an immigration officer in London.

I approached her, sort of worried about what was going to happen. She was a woman – a white

woman – a brusque British type who just gets things done. She showed zero prejudice. She asked, *“why are you here?”*

She stamped my passport.

I said, *“I’m here because I write. I’m here for an event”*.

She said, *“What do you write?”*

Usually I say, I write fiction, which is true. But that day, for some reason, I decided to say I write about feminism. She paused as if she was taken aback. And then she went back to sort of looking at the passport. And so I asked, *“Do you think feminism is important?”*

She paused, again, paid a little too much attention to my passport, and then said, *“Yes”*.

I said to her - I said this with curiosity, but with no judgment. I said *“but you had to think about it first”*.

She said *“well, because people use it as a dirty word, don’t they?”* And then after another pause, she added, *“but that’s not what it is, is it? It’s really about treating everyone equally”*.

“Exactly” I said to her.

For some reason her words warmed my heart. And as I turned to leave, she pointed at my orange backpack, and she said *“I like your bag, is it a posh one?”* That warmed my heart even more.

Now that bit about the bag is irrelevant on the surface, but I’m a fiction writer. And it is details such as these that a novelist uses to ground their storytelling.

If I were to recast this episode with the woman, in a story, a story about the basic and simple meaning of feminism, as told by a middle-aged immigration officer in London, I would certainly use that detail about her admiring my bag because it humanizes her. Because it shows that feminism is not about unreasonable, angry women, who do not shave and who hate men. Feminism is quite simply about justice. And also, it is about handbags.

I think that storytelling is very important. On the subject of gender equality, I think, of course that laws are important, and policies are important. But I’ve always felt that what’s even more important, is changing mindsets, changing norms, changing the way we think about things. And I think that the way that we can do that, is through storytelling.

I am of course biased, because I'm a storyteller, and I'm a writer, and literature is the love of my life. But I know from my life as a reader, and as a writer, that stories can profoundly change the way we look at the world.

There's a particular study that was conducted in the UK, mostly by booksellers, and it showed that women read books by men and women and men read books by men. I do have to say that there are exceptions such as the lovely gentleman who's sitting next to me at this dinner, who the past two books he read were by women. But I would like to ask the men in this room to think about the past two books that they've read. Three books. Four books.

They were by men, you know, they were by men.

I think that one of the ways in which we can change this question of gender inequality is to have men read more books by women and about women. I think that storytelling lets us get to the nuance of things, lets us see that things are never quite black and white. It lets us see the complexities - for example, that women, too, can be misogynistic. That we live in a world that is drenched in misogyny and so, somehow, I would like to say that we breathe this air, all of us. So it's not so much that only men are misogynistic, even though men have to fix the problem. But I think that storytelling lets us get to this sort of nuance.

I grew up on a university campus in Nigeria, at the University of Nigeria at Nsuka. My father was a professor. It was a very happy childhood and a very academic and cosmopolitan environment. Of course, there were many more male professors than female professors. At some point, they were just two women who were professors when I was growing up in the in the early 1980s. One of them was a formidable woman. I remember how she would be talked about, and people would say *"Oh, she's so difficult. She's so aggressive."* Even as a child, it struck me that she behaved in exactly the same way as many of the male professors who were not described in that way. I think, for me, as a child watching the world, it was little stories of this that illustrated the idea that the world often does not extend to women, the same graces that it extends to men. Through storytelling, we get to understand this idea of the double standard, so that a woman is called arrogant for behaving in the same way as a man who is called confident. That a man sometimes is called assertive when a woman is called aggressive, or that a man is called a very good leader, and a woman is called controlling.

Before I end, I just want to share I'm very good at sharing the things that profoundly irritate me. So I'll just share one with you. One of those things is to hear some men and some women who respond to a woman's story of having been sexually assaulted or harassed with questions like, *"Why is she coming out now? Why didn't she report it right away? Why has she waited for so long?"*

And maybe it makes sense, a kind of logical sense that is completely lacking in context and complexity, to immediately report an episode of harassment. But the reality of lived experience is very different. And it is stories, I think, that can illuminate this. Storytelling forces us to think of people as people, not as abstractions who have to conform to some sort of bloodless logic of *“if you get harassed, go report it right away”*.

And, by the way, what we often call objective logic is often our own carefully formed prejudice. And so, I know, for example, that I have behaved in ways that have surprised myself in moments of shock. You think you're going to be this brave, noble superhero and then you realize that you're sort of cowardly, or frightened, or just struck down.

So, the idea that a woman might lie about having been sexually harassed irritates me profoundly. Because I know many women. I have asked many women, and I haven't found one. I'm sure, maybe, there is one somewhere out there, who wants to become famous for having been raped. So maybe, maybe, if women are talking about being sexually harassed or sexually assaulted, we should, maybe, as a first option, believe them.

Speaking of sexual harassment –

Sorry, I know I'm spoiling your dinner. Nobody wants to talk about sexual harassment while they're having their nice dessert. But yes, I will spoil your dinner. –

I recently read, where a celebrity who was talking about women on International Women's Day - which is that deal where everybody sort of comes out and has wonderful things to say about women, whether or not they believe it. This person said, we must revere women.

It really bothered me. Because women are not special. Women are not little gods that we have to revere. Women are just human.

I think that the danger in this thinking is that if women are seen as somehow special, somehow morally better, then, there's a level of autonomy they're denied. I think we cannot be fully free, until we are free to feel. And I've always felt that it must be really tough to be an angel. I mean, that burden of perfection must be terrible.

I think that it is, again, storytelling that shows us the nuances of the humanity of women, that the case for women being equal in the world is not because they're better. It's simply because they're human. I think that storytelling helps us to unlearn a lot of the things that we've learned. I think it also helps us to educate and re educate. I often make the case that I think that it's so important

that we raise children differently, not just girls, but also boys.

There's a quote from a novel I admire by Meg Wolitzer. In the novel, she writes *"the mother had gotten it into her head early on, that boys could not be tamed. So there was no point in even trying."* I was struck by this line, because I think that this idea of the inevitability of male failure, and sort of the low standards that we hold men to is something that we can change. We don't have to say things like *"Oh, he did it, because men will be men."* We can, in fact, change things. And it is by telling stories and telling things differently. And for boys, for example, who have been told for so long *"you shouldn't cry because you're a boy,"* it's not just that we have to find ways to tell stories to show that boys should cry, because they're human and sadness is a human emotion, but that we should teach girls that it's okay for boys to cry, because that's equally important.

I think most of all, that storytelling is so important because we need to all, collectively, acknowledge the full humanity of women. It can seem obvious. I'm sure a lot of people here are thinking *"of course women are human, what is she talking about?"* But if our world truly valued the full humanity of women, then I would not be here talking about feminism.



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