



SOLIDAR

BEHIND

Nationalism

The upcoming European elections in May 2019 will determine the future of the European Union, the ambition of this exciting and often contested project. Against the backdrop of a general frustration that the EU is not delivering on the social dimension, that too often European solutions are not reached, authoritarian nationalists and populists will try to have the opinion leadership in the election campaign.

SOLIDAR is convinced that we will have to reply to their arguments, to stand against the fake news and right wing propaganda. Therefore, we present a first handbook of counterarguments which gives “munition” for the electoral campaign and which helps to bust populist right wing arguments.

For the first step we have selected 9 questions:

1. Does the EU have an added value in our daily life?
2. Is the EU promoting sustainable development and jobs?
3. Would more European social policies help us all?
4. Is sealing borders a solution for containing migration?
5. Does the allocation of resources for integrating migrants harm our welfare system at the national level?
6. Why do we need the EU budget to invest in education?
7. Is the EU and its Member States really putting too much money in developing countries?
8. Why does the EU not help to tackle corruption and tax avoidance more effectively?
9. If we give the EU more financial autonomy, would we have less money available for national purposes, like investment in social and public services?

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1. Does the EU have an added value in our daily life?

Many people question the added value of the EU, and wonder whether it is more of an expense than an investment. Nationalists fuel the idea that the EU is a preposterous entity, detached from the daily issues of the people and ruling over our lives. **But the EU is an added value** - Member states couldn't have achieved the same results in many areas, without belonging to the EU. Some examples are:

- **the freedom of movement.** It allows people to move freely from one country to another every day to study, work, or simply travel
- the programme **Erasmus+**¹, enabling 4 million students, teachers and workers - between 2014 and 2020, to participate in **learning experiences abroad**, and financing civil society organisations' projects in the field of education and training targeting youth
- the **European Social Fund**², which supports **social inclusion and job qualification**, channelling resources up to €43 billion from the Members States who have more, to those who have less
- The **Youth Guarantee scheme**³, since 2014, created employment, continued education, a traineeship or an apprenticeship for **more than 3.5 million young people each year**
- the **EU Solidarity Fund**⁴, which has transferred **€5 billion to 24 Member states and their citizens** who fell victim of natural disasters, such as fires, floods or earthquakes. Without pooling resources of all the member States, **rebuilding roads, schools and houses for the victims** would have taken more time **and the toll for the local population would have been insurmountable**
- the Single Market overall, which has generated an extra €233 billion of trade each year,

and created 2.77 million jobs, **ensuring** that the products and goods circulating across Europe respect **the highest standards in the world for quality, safety, and environmental impact**

Sharing policies means sharing rules, opportunities **and rights**.

The **Charter of Fundamental Rights** ensures that all Europeans are entitled of fundamental rights, creating one more level of protection. It took a long time, but now we finally see also positive developments in the area of **social protection**. A primary example is the Proclamation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**⁷ in November 2017 in Gothenburg, which paves the way for introducing social protection for every worker, including those in non-standard forms of employment – such as the zero-hour contracts – that would ensure that every worker in Europe is treated equally.

2. Is the EU promoting sustainable development and jobs?

Yes, definitely, but not enough!

The EU is strongly promoting the creation of jobs and sustainable development. In fact, it's one of its main functions: **50% of EU money**⁸ **is spent on creating jobs and growth as well as supporting poorer regions of Europe**. Another big chunk is invested in agriculture, rural development and environmental protection.

Contrary to nationalist claims, Brussels is not swallowing up money without giving it back to the Member States. **94% of EU money is re-invested back in Member States and only 6% is used for EU administration**, which is a lot less when compared to national administration. Especially countries which have been lagging behind have benefited from EU membership. Out of the total 28, **19 Member States actually receive more money than they pay into the EU bud-**

get. The other 9 are the richest, who can transfer more money than what they receive, because the EU is contributing to the wellbeing of the people with a redistributive principle of solidarity.

In terms of convergence, the EU supports the creation of jobs particularly through the Cohesion Policy. This policy redistributes money out of the **EU budget to help poorer regions catch up** with the richest ones. Between the years of 2007 to 2012, the EU has created an additional **600 000 jobs**, at least one third of them in small and medium sized enterprises. With the Cohesion policy, **25 000 km of roads and 1 800 km of rail were constructed or modernised** by the EU to help establish an efficient trans-European transport network.

Nevertheless, mere economic growth is not enough and hampers our natural resources. This is why **SOLIDAR, with its members and partners, hold the EU accountable for its commitment towards making its economic development sustainable, social and environmental.** This means that the European Funds are directed towards social inclusion, as not to leave anyone behind, and a low-carbon economy, to safeguard our health and nature.

3. Would European social policies help us all?

Europe needs to take a turn – **a social turn** – to **regain the trust of its citizens.** Wealth will not trickle down by itself so we need to make sure that everyone benefits from economic growth and the European project. What happens at the moment, however, is that the poorest and most vulnerable are played off against each other.

Fighting inequality within and across Member States is the only way to tackle its root causes, overcoming nationalism and

working towards a common European future. It is clear that with a dreadful figure of **118 million people** (23.5% of the population) **living in or at the risk of poverty or social exclusion** in the EU⁹, 22 million are unemployed and 23 million are working poor. The real causes of inequality cannot be solely fought against on the national level. This is why we need the EU, we must join forces and make this our priority.

Precarious working conditions have made too many people experience exclusion and disadvantage. Solutions are **robust labour right standards** for all no matter if you work in Italy, Bulgaria or the Netherlands. The EU has a budget of **150 million for the period 2014-2020 that helps dismissed workers** affected by globalization¹⁰. Another programme is the European Directive for Posted Workers, which introduced clear and binding rules for **equal rights for 2 million people** who temporarily carry out their work in another EU Member State other than the state in which they normally work¹¹. All of these efforts are important but we need a strategy that is more encompassing.

Only with a strong social agenda incorporated in an overall plan for the future of Europe will make up for years of austerity and wrong priorities that have fueled anger and disappointment. The European Pillar of Social Rights, focusing on equal opportunities to access the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection, is a good start point and now urgently needs implementation. **By voting in these European elections, you make a choice over making this European social agenda happen:** reduce poverty, increase living standards, work for better working conditions and ensure social protection for all.

4. Is sealing borders a solution for containing migration?

The nationalist far right portray migrants as a threat for our society. They also say that sealing the borders is a solution, and the only one, to prevent them from reaching Europe.

This is not the truth:

- **A humanitarian problem needs a humanitarian solution**
 - **Sealing borders is a crime the EU is responsible for. And it has only one consequence – killing people who flee wars, prosecution, climate disasters, poverty.** Indeed, the International Organisation for Migration figures show that the number of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea in 2018 is already up to **1260**.¹² It is mainly thanks to the NGOs operating at sea and putting solidarity in action to rescue human lives that the number isn't even higher
 - **Migrants are not a threat, and most of those arriving to Europe have the right to seek international protection** (asylum seekers and refugees). In fact, the number of applications for international protection in 2018 was **136.665**¹³ in October. The margin of error in according the international protection to people who shouldn't have got it being remarkably lower than that of protection given to people who shouldn't have got it

The protection of these people is an obligation for all the European Member States, according to the European Treaties and International Conventions that have been ratified. It is also a moral hazard taking into account our own history of migration in, out and across Europe. More specifically we can't arbitrarily close our borders or reject migrants without having clarified their need of international protection, according to the 1951 Refugee Convention as well as the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

- **Migration is a structural feature of our times, due to global inequalities – including the consequences of wars and climate change and demographic trends.** Poverty and the lack of decent work are the primary driving forces of international migration. Therefore, the only way to address the root causes of migration is to tackle unemployment and poverty in migrants' countries of origin with proper development and cooperation funds.

5. Does the allocation of resources for integrating migrants harm our welfare system at the national level?

Resources allocated for integrating migrants and refugees are social investment and as such the return of the investment is a safer, fairer, society for all. The far right fuels hatred and resentment among the most vulnerable ones in our society.

Migrants, if they are well integrated in the labour market, pay taxes that contribute to support the general sustainability of public budget that we all benefit from. The International Labour Organisation data shows that migrant workers contribute to the economies of their host countries. Yet at the same time migrant workers often enjoy little social protection, face inequalities in the labour market and are vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking¹⁴. Moreover, undocumented migrants only have the right to emergency healthcare and only refugees have the right to access social protection.

- **Migrants help counterbalancing demographic trends, hence they support the sustainability of the welfare system.** Unaccompanied children represent a large share of the population reaching Europe - UNICEF reported that in 2016 **92% of the minors** who reached

Italy by sea travelled alone. If we want better life conditions for all and a cohesive society instead of disinvesting in social infrastructures like education. We have to invest in the access to education, the labour market, as well as in the international recognition of existing skills and qualifications.

6. Why do we need the EU budget to invest in education?

The recent **crackdown on education and civil society** by Hungary's far-right government illustrates a growing narrative of austerity policies against initiatives taken to enhance skills for participatory democracy. In SOLIDAR's study visit to Hungary¹⁵ for the **Education and Lifelong Learning pillar**, local NGOs and civil society shared growing concerns with our member organisations over public investment for non-formal education including life skills and vocational training, inclusive education and volunteering programmes.

Despite some national governments' dissatisfaction with the content and learning approaches used in non-formal education, the European Union has continued to **support programmes that aim to promote skills for democracy**. Contrary to far-right discourses on seeing formal education as the only tool necessary for the labour market, the European Union has acknowledged and recognised that non-formal learning increases the learner's intrinsic motivation, voluntary participation and critical thinking needed for democratic participation, essential to the future European elections. Furthermore, the EU has:

- Promoted inclusive education through vocational education and training with around **650,000** students able to participate through the Erasmus+ Programme¹⁶, which offers strategic partnerships to 125,000 schools, vocational

education and training institutions, higher and adult education institutions, youth organisations and enterprises with a **€14.7 billion overall budget**.

- Giving financial support to civil society organisations to develop platforms such as the **YourVoteMatters!** digital platform to reach a cohort of depoliticised and marginalised young people representing the 'lost generation' is critical to have more democratic participation in elections.¹⁷

Boosting EU funding and increased access to non-formal education in most member states will represent a major pushback against the right wing agenda of austerity and privatization. **The examples of progressive governments such as the Portuguese ones with strong public investments should be followed and serve as example for roadmap for creating a social Europe.**

7. Is the EU and its Members States really putting too much money in poor countries?

In terms of Official Development Aid (ODA), the EU and its Member States is the biggest development aid donor globally. Indeed, EU development cooperation is largely contributing to promote social and economic development. For example, between 2013-2017:

- 12 million women of reproductive age and children under five benefitted from nutrition-related programmes;
- 50 million children were enrolled in primary education;
- 20 million births were attended by skilled health personnel, helping to reduce maternal mortality;
- 60 million women were supported to use contraception methods.

These facts are often used by nationalists to argue that Europe is spending too much money to support poor countries and that the money should instead be used to improve their own life. Nevertheless, is Europe really that generous?

To answer this question, we should firstly remember that even if European Union Member States committed themselves to allocating 0.7 % of their Gross National Income to development aid, in 2017 only 4 of them reached that goal (Denmark, Luxembourg, Sweden and the United Kingdom). In the EU, while 10% of the commission's budget goes to aid for developing countries, it accounts for only 5 cents per EU inhabitant each year¹⁸.

Secondly, nationalist interests are pushing the EU to put migration's control as a main objective of development cooperation well above the objective of social and economic development, poverty eradication and reduced inequalities – and to use development aid to this purpose.

Finally, **while EU development cooperation is proving some good results, its effects are weakened by unsustainable practice put in place by multinational companies** (including European ones) that invest in developing countries but **do not pay their fair taxes and way too often violate human rights**. Indeed, according to conservative estimates corporate tax avoidance is costing developing countries between €60 billion and €100 billion per year. So, at the end, what it is given with one hand is taken with the other.

Indeed, tax avoidance and tax evasion are putting at stake countries' capacity to improve their citizen's lives: **every euro lost to tax havens, is a euro that could have been invested in public services** - to pay doctors and teachers, fund vaccinations, invest in school seats for children. **Only together and with a European regulation we**

can tackle efficiently these issues and ensure that European development and cooperation aid contribute to improve people's lives.

8. Why does the EU not help to tackle corruption and tax avoidance more effectively?

Nationalists and far rights parties have called for a return to national measures in enforcing current legislation to tackle **cross-border tax avoidance and corruption**. The European Commission estimates annual revenue losses amounting to **€1 trillion from tax avoidance and evasion**¹⁹, while the European Parliament estimates that corruption has costed the EU up to **€990 billion each year**, leaving greater economic and social disparities within and across member states, with high levels of organised crime **and increased public distrust in national authorities and governments**. Because tax avoidance and corruption are **cross-border issues** that affect all member states, belonging to the European Union means that:

- Member States and their tax authorities can have a **wider impact** in tackling tax avoidance and corruption **through international and European cross-border cooperation**, automatic exchange of information as the recent Common Reporting Standard enables to do so.
- Member states that are cooperating can support the establishment and implementation of **legally binding measures** to safeguard compliance with European standards and restrict decrease in tax revenues **needed to fund public services, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals**²⁰ that aim to boost public revenues and eradicate poverty.

Fighting corruption while ensuring greater transparency and sharing of information requires Member States **to join forces at the European**

and at the international level and not to undermine efforts from the European Commission like this year.

9. If we give the EU more financial autonomy, would we have less money for national purposes, like public services?

The story goes like this: giving the EU greater financing for its budget would mean having less money for national purses used in large part for providing public services and funding social security systems. In reality:

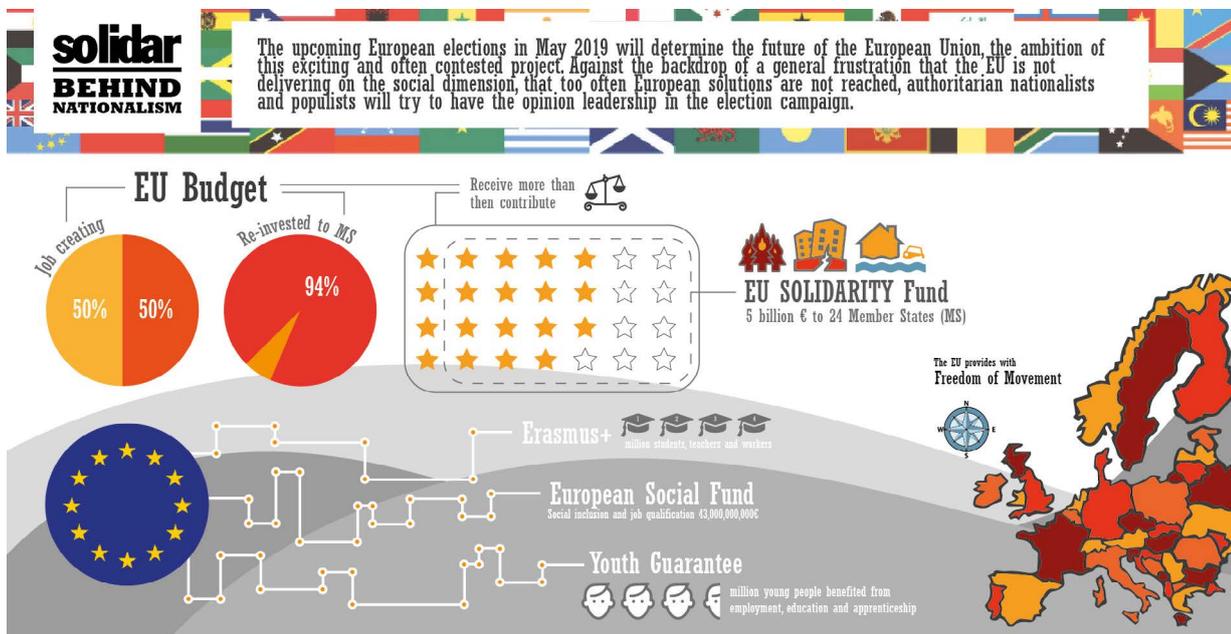
- Policy experience proves that equality cannot be achieved solely within the boundaries of a state. The incomes of households in the EU tend to depend more and more on European factors; however, **any decision on EU financing requires the EU countries' unanimous agreement and subsequent ratification**, in line with their constitutional requirements
- By pooling resources to **introduce a real social dimension of the EU**, thus boosting social investments, the EU can help tackling inequality not only within but also between Member States²¹
- The EU budget represents **only 1% of the combined EU income** and only about 2% of EU public spending and is contained in the current EU budget for the 2014-2020²²

- For instance, in 2013 the average EU citizen paid 283 euros a year towards the EU budget. This is **less than a euro a day** - not very expensive given the benefits that the EU brings its citizens.
- The EU budget is an investment that, if well generated, pays back in terms of a predictable future of Europe and its citizens.

The EU needs its own fiscal capacity to **cope with macroeconomic shocks** and enhance Member States' stability when faced with global economic and financial crises such as the one experienced in 2008.

We need a complementary European Unemployment Benefit scheme helping to anticipate future crises and to avoid the trap of "too big to fail" when public budgets served to save private financial institutions and creating public deficits and too many countries.

In the end it will need a radical political change for a more social, more inclusive and more protective European Union. This is what we want to support through our daily work and through our engagement in the European elections campaign "this time I'm voting" – hopefully in favour of the Europe we want and for which we need progressive majorities in the next European Parliament and not more enemies of Europe, of our democracies and our values!



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