

# European Union in Need of a “Relaunch”

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Eurocrisis in the  
Press

By *Dimitris Mathioudakis*

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In its simplest sense, the winner is the one to come first. In the same sense, for the front-runner of last European elections, Jean Claude Juncker, the votes of the EPP signalled a win. However, a win in politics – and especially European politics – is much more than this. It depends on the context and the perspective.

Regarding the context, the headline gains were for nationalist and Eurosceptic parties. Their participation in the new European Parliament is increased in terms of numbers, and maybe even more significant, in terms of popularity. Especially, after the [rapid expansion](#) of mass media and the [politicization](#) of European politics discourse it wouldn't be an exaggeration to argue that the new “celebrities” in European politics are not pro-Europeans. And the fact that it has drawn such an attention seems to be the greatest success of euro-scepticism.



Nowadays, its leaders enjoy [extensive publicity](#) in the media and their nationalist views sound revolutionary for a generation which has grown up considering the benefits of European Union as given. Besides, the above is made evident by the preferences of young Europeans for Eurosceptic parties in the last European elections. On the other side, pro-European leaders focus their dialectic in ideas. In specific, their [arguments](#) highlight a vague concern on the rise of euroscepticism and past sufferings due to nationalism. They easily argue against populism but they remain dramatically distant from issues of everyday life. Authentic and convincing arguments in favour of a pro-European agenda, originating either from the present EU experience or from future inspirational pan-European initiatives are lacking in practice and rhetoric alike.

The vision of a common European political and economic space seems to be losing ground. Its advocates are too unimaginative; too conventional to represent an entity that once appeared as the most original political project in European history. The pro-European agenda is considerably short of attractive new ideas that can inspire Europeans and stimulate them to invest their political input in an innovative and dynamic common aspiration. (Closer) European integration, as such, sounds too bureaucratic to motivate people. Let alone the fact that, nowadays, closer integration means macroeconomic regulations which, despite their significance, are too “neutral” and technocratic to stir the masses. Banking integration, stricter budgetary supervision, austerity measures and other policies that constitute the political agenda of Mr. Juncker and EPP party seem to be remnants of an incomplete plan of the 1990s.

Regarding the perspective, the answer comes from Mr. Juncker himself, who argued that “we must strengthen our focus on social issues, but what we have done to combat this crisis has been fundamentally correct” ([EPP Congress](#), Dublin, 7 March 2014). For a “true European”, as Mr. Juncker likes to be called, it should be clear that the very existence of the European integration project was based on originality, creativity and innovation. The EU never counted its progress on rearguard actions. On the opposite, since its very beginning, it pioneered in shaping the political and economic environment in and around itself, rather than adjusting to it. In these terms, the European reaction of constantly seeking for approval by the financial markets in its actions to combat the crisis was at least inconsequential to European tradition. Additionally, the proverb “in unity there is strength” which, in general terms describes the logic underpinning the establishment of the European integration project, misses its practical meaning and leaves ample room for euro-scepticism to dispute EU initiative.

Therefore, from the perspective of pro-Europeans, the first place of EPP party does not signal a clear win. In order to

be so, European peoples should regain interest in a common European ideal. The EU should regain the lead in shaping outcomes and not merely following or being responsive to them. The new EU leadership has to forge a set of original challenges focused on innovative policies to reinvigorate the existing shabby and unattractive framework of European integration. Time will show, whether a progressive relaunch is viable under the leadership of time-worn, veteran EU officials.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Euro Crisis in the Press blog, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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