



EUROPEAN PROGRESS CONFERENCE



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THE CASE FOR EUROPEAN OPTIMISM



WE BELIEVE THE BEST DAYS OF EUROPE ARE AHEAD, NOT BEHIND US.

That might sound naive in today's climate, where current discourse across the continent is often marked by deep pessimism. The future feels uncertain, ambitions shrink, and optimism in retreat. From economic anxieties to technological stagnation, to security threats, many speak of decline as if it were inevitable.

And yes, it's easy to think that our best days are behind us.

AI is advancing elsewhere. NATO looks strained. Energy costs soar. Labour markets wobble. Russia menaces. Living standards stagnate.

Yet history teaches a different lesson: pessimism has never solved a crisis. It is only through optimism—serious, strategic optimism—the reality-checked belief that problems bend once we have a plan.

This is why the EU needs a new intellectual movement—one that makes the case for progress, for ambition, and for belief in what Europe can still become.

Europe, in fact, has repeatedly shown its capacity to renew itself.

After the Second World War, cities were rebuilt brick by brick. From the post-war economic miracle in the West to the integration of the post-Soviet bloc into a single European market, standards of living rose, barriers fell, and millions gained access to dignity and opportunity.

From 1950 to today, average life expectancy in Europe rose by more than 15 years. Child mortality dropped by over 90%. Access to education, healthcare, and clean water became the norm—not the exception. Historically, our continent has been a center of scientific innovation exemplified by Newton and Curie, cultural expression through Bach and Dante, philosophical exploration via Kant and Rousseau. They emerged from choices—people organizing, experimenting, building. From a belief that tomorrow could be better than today, and a willingness to make it so.

Optimism is necessary—but it's not enough. We also need to understand how progress actually happened in the past. Not just the end results, but the mechanisms—across science, industry, economy, and governance.

Because when you look closely, you see that progress never came by chance.

There were centuries where nothing changed and decades where everything did. We believe this difference isn't random. It came from deliberate decisions and actions. From people, institutions, and movements pulling in the same direction.

The European Union is one of the clearest examples—arguably the most successful peace project in human history. It was built by those who believed Europe could choose a different path: cooperation over conflict, invention over inertia, and solidarity over despair.

It was human agency that made progress possible. And it's human agency that can do it again. But to act decisively, we need to understand what worked—and why. Only then can we make it happen again, faster this time.

Progress across every domain is possible—with the recognition that things have already improved dramatically over the past few centuries, the awareness that major problems remain, and the conviction that we can do far better.

But why does progress matter today? Because it speaks to the core challenges Europe faces—security, prosperity, and dignity. In each, a future-oriented Europe can lead instead of lag.

- **Security:** An innovative Europe deters adversaries better than a dependent one.
- **Prosperity:** Frontier technologies— AI, Biotech, fusion, quantum—are trillion-euro opportunities if we choose to lead, not follow.
- **Dignity:** Higher living standards are the most durable answer to populism's anger and autocracy's allure.

We can have abundant energy.
We can build affordable housing.
We can revitalise our labor markets.
We can grow the economy.
We can accelerate scientific breakthroughs.

To kick-start this new intellectual direction, we're building the European Progress Network—a home for the thinkers, doers, and institutions ready to put in the work to spur the next era of Europe's progress.

It is a home for everyone who believes in Europe's future and is ready to contribute—across disciplines, sectors, and borders.

Progress thinking is grounded in evidence, guided by human agency, and committed to solving real problems in the real world.

The European Progress Conference is the first step to establish this new intellectual direction. It is both a platform and a commitment: to generate policy proposals, foster innovation ecosystems, and develop frameworks capable of adapting to the challenges that progress inevitably brings.

This is our collective task. Europe's diversity is not a barrier, but a strength. Complexity is not an excuse, but a challenge worthy of our best efforts. By combining intellectual depth with clear direction, we aim to recover a pragmatic optimism rooted in our shared heritage and future potential.

Through thoughtful engagement and strategic action, we can shape a resilient, forward-looking Europe. One that not only remembers its legacy, but writes its next chapter—together.


President, Global Policy Research Group

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Unlocking Europe's next era of progress - across science, the economy,
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