

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to begin by saying how **honoured** and **humbled** I am by the invitation to the **IIPPE** (International Initiative for Promoting Progressive Economy) Annual Conference. Honoured – having a chance to hold one of the closing words of the three days of intensive debates. Humbled – since being a political scientist, I would perhaps never imagined myself requested to be addressing an economic conference.

Indeed, if you had asked me a couple of year ago – I most likely wouldn't even dare picturing that. To say more – I would perhaps most of all fear such a possibility. I rather thought I finalized my adventure with economic studies on the cold, grey, winter afternoon of the year 1998 – when I was receiving my B grade upon the end of the first term exam. The subject was "Introduction to economy" and my B stood for 'best I thought I could do', and hence a decade later I opted out for philosophy and not economy as seconding qualifying subject for my PhD degree. I am as guilty here, as charged.

I guess I did not pursue the economic studies mostly out of fear that many of us – non-economists tend to have, feeling that should we take a stand on even a remotely related matter we would prove our ignorance in the subject in so many different ways. But, this is of course a **false prejudice and unjust presumption**, which throughout the years of research I found the way to combat.

The essential to that was help and continuous collaboration with many great, esteemed colleagues, such as present here **Giovanni Cozzi and Remi Bazilier**. They were the ones patiently helping me grasp their field of expertise, while insisting at the same time that I elaborate on the related aspects and mechanisms of political sciences, political thinking and political processes. **Through that I found the relationship between politics, political sciences and economy no longer intimidating, but rather crucial and indispensable.** The key remains readiness to enter the dialogue, to look at things through other people's lenses and consequently to be able to jointly discover the truly complex nature of reality around us.

Personally it is empowering, politically it is essential. That is especially if the progressive movement, which I have devoted almost half of my life to already, is – as I would hope – to regain the say, is to construct a new socio-economic paradigm and herewith is to frame the 21st century developments in a totally different to the current neo-liberal mainstreaming model.

This belief is what brings me therefore here, knowing that the commitment to pursue such a dialogue is one of the constituting rules of the IIPPE. And this is why, on my side, I am ready to take the challenge that the organisers entrusted me with – namely to try to address the question of "*Economic Activism*" from the angle most familiar to me. It will be therefore not so much about economy, but about politics of economy – which sadly so often ends up detached from the genuine economic theories focused on sustainability, equality and social justice. In that sense I will

speak on how can we reconnect – in order to go beyond the current division in between “**mainstreaming: right** and **alternative: wrong**” – and instead will try to look together with you how to replace it by the profound choice between neoliberal and progressive.

Knowing that the contemporary academic life is so much subjected to the audits based on utilitarian output criteria, **I will try to structure my intervention to relate to the three of IIPPE constitutional goals – on criticizing the mainstream economics, on advancing political economy across other political sciences and on engaging with activism through formulation of progressive policy and support for progressive movements. I will do so from the perspective of a senior researcher at the FEPS – Foundation for European Progressive Studies, who has been in charge of the FEPS Next Left Research programme since its conception in 2009 and who is working in Brussels in a highly politicized environment. The logic of my presentation will follow the principles set half of a century ago in the groundbreaking work of Thomas Kuhn “The Structure of Scientific Revolution” – where he points out that the paradigm shift is a *mélange of sociology, enthusiasm and scientific promise*.**

If you allow me, I would like to begin with a short explanation about FEPS, as most obviously it will be my reference point to which I will return in the loops of my discourse.

FEPS – Foundation for European Progressive Studies is a pan-European political think tank, which was established following the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in 2008. To emphasize some of the elements for which the anchoring in this particular treaty is relevant, I would like to recall that it was agreed upon following the European Pause of Reflection to which the Union resorted itself after the failure of so called “Constitutional Treaty”. The period between the rejection of it by French and Dutch citizens and the momentum of a new draft was used by the European institutions to embark on so called ‘Plan D’ – following which it was underlined that for Europe to survive a new way must be pursued to connect the integration processes with the social dimension. This would have implication in the policies, but also in conceptualizing **new connections** through which citizens could not only “live” Europe – but actually participate in shaping it to a greater extend. Consequently, an agreement was reached to establish political foundations that would operate in connection with the respective Europarties and the groups in the European Parliament.

The foundations would serve a triple folded purpose. They were entrusted with developing European political thoughts. They were to become the platforms enabling exchange between worlds of politics and academia. And they were to enable a better connection between the European and national, regional debate – which would be seen as famous “bridging the gap”. The resources of the foundations would predominantly be originating from the European budget, being divided among them accordingly to the size of ‘their’ respective group in the European Parliament. This would mean that currently, to give an example, the largest support is transferred to the Conservative Martens Center. With those very general rules in

terms of operational manual, all the newly established foundations embarked each on their own establishment process. It brought interesting results – as during the AFCO (Constitutional Affairs Committee) hearing in 2013, when each of them was to summarize its' 5 first years – each came with a different presentation, had shown respectively a unique organizational culture and herewith also proved that the focus of activities can be very diverse. To that extent, also the grade of closeness to their respective European party can vary – making some very much embedded in the partisan activism, and some proud of being close, however still independent. FEPS is one of them.

In terms of FEPS, **there are a couple of aspects that I would qualify as particularly relevant strengths of the organization. First of all, it operates on an interesting junction in between politics and academia, having means and ways of engaging broadly understood society in its exchanges.** This is an important feature, as all the ideas that emerge are almost immediately tested through conversations alongside of the criteria of appeal, plausibility and available channels of operationalising them.

Secondly, **it has built an impressive network, enabling an emancipated exchange among different academics – who are very keen on participating in debates with one another and also feel a motivation to translate their work into an intellectual support for the progressive movements.** It is a very different way of offering a platform and possibility to belong in a more liberated manner than the traditional partisanship nowadays can offer. It allows herewith the progressive scholars to also “find one another” in their pluralistic approaches. FEPS takes pride in making that the construct of its network abides by the 3G criteria – of geographical, gender and generation balanced – for which purpose also the **FEPS Young Academics Network** was established. It included young progressive pre-PhD and post-doctoral lecturers, whose work is a guarantee that FEPS work is not only about young people – but also is built by young ones.

Thirdly, **FEPS is an umbrella organization for over 40 members from Europe and outside.** What is quite exceptional is that they are very diverse in their nature – some being what you would see as by-party institutes, some that you would see as independent political societies and some that perhaps could be characterized as developmental organisations. This pluralism of formats, cultures and consequently priorities could appear as very difficult to unite – but in the FEPS assessment this diversity is a great asset. **The cooperation with them is about fostering mutual understanding, ensuring sufficient openings so that all the points are taken into consideration and to that end this is what makes the agenda of FEPS holistic, exciting and pan-European.**

So this is our departure point – the progressive, European organization with a set of goals, means to realize them and channels to promote them through. Your obvious question at this point is therefore – so what happened next, since the dream of a platform in the end come true? *Why didn't they, if you want, just live happily ever after? Why is the Europe we know not only not turning left, but drifting towards*

right and carrying many of the progressive parties alongside that drift with a feasible danger of drowning? Please let me address those in the remaining time.

As explained already, when the idea of the political foundations emerged on the European horizon, the dominant understanding was that the worst that could happen to Europe was over. The institutional crisis was considered mended and with the consensus over Lisbon, even if challenged in the Irish referendum, there was an appealing feeling that there is finally a light in the tunnel. It was falsely assumed, while the light was just a sparkle and in fact there was no real realization that at the end of this particular tunnel was no less by a Rabbit Hole – as deep as the one Jonathan Carroll described in the book that recently celebrated its jubilee namely “Alice in Wonderland”. But – though it was similarly peculiar and the metaphor could go as far as even imagining who in Europe the Queen of Hearts is, there was nothing – but really nothing wonder-full about it. Indeed, following the disaster of 2008, European Union sank in crisis.

Against what you may expect at this point, I am not going to embark onto the deliberations on the crisis. It is undoubtedly profound, but to be perfectly honest both the predicament, as also especially its’ European dimension have been both over- and under- explained.

There are tonnes of quality literature that analyze the causes of the crash and point at the devastating character of the mainstreaming logic of neo-liberalism. It has been identified to be a drive of the current stage of capitalism, which got labeled as “financial one”. What it means perception-wise is that all the dimensions of human activism – from political, through social (communitarian) towards the individual ones are being rationalized through a prism of one, dominant metaphor. The phenomenon of ‘financialisation’ – as it was eloquently called – meant that these days all begins and ends being classified on either of the side of the “household budget”. Everything is either spending or income – and these two very narrowly defined criteria pushed out the categories such as investment, welfare and prosperity. There is the obligation to balance budgets at the end of the year in order “not to live on the cost of the future generations” – but there is no talk on how to ensure in their name continuous commitment to social progress and fair distribution of its benefits. Alongside these lines the crisis was explained by the dominant political forces as an end-result of wrong public policies, which allowed escaping a discomfort of an honest conversation what was really wrong and led to the crisis. Late Tony Judt pointed that out in his excellent book “Ill fares the land”.

Further examples could be called upon – and you surely know them far better than me. **What I would like to draw your attention here is the political impact of those enunciations. With all that “over explaining” – the perplexing remaining question remains – why, as Colin Crouch suggested, – we are still witnessing “the strange non-death of neo-liberalism”.**

It astonishes indeed, that with such clear evidence that the system does not work, there has been no attempt to profoundly transform it so far. Or, maybe to be here

fairer, no successful attempt can be recalled. To the contrary, it seems that those actors, who hoped the most for the crash to be a catalyst of a change, social democracy included, effectively conformed in large extent to the developments and expected the societies to do the same as well. Herewith the “crisis aftermath” became a rhetorical figure serving as a political justification as to why austerity was necessary. “Political”, because for societies the harsh conditions have stopped being crisis-related and became the only, by the way widely contested, reality that they would remember or know.

This is an important confession without which it would be quite impossible to explain why the new scientific revolution has not happened. Immediately after the crisis hit, should you walk into a room with social democrats discussing that as a matter – you would hear sentences such as *“it is a clear proof we cannot continue like this. There will be no return to business as usual”*. Indeed, return was not possible, as the assumed scarcity of resources would never allow that – but there was a hope that something new, different would emerge. It did on the centre-right, taking the course of austerity – which was proclaimed to be the only way to *manage*. That set a different course for the rest of the developments, as the parties started to compete on this particular criteria of “managing” – and herewith the centre-left drifted towards a line that made it known infamously as the “light austerity” party. Having moved to the centre-centre-right, it opened a new flank – which offered grounds for more radical voices to raise. Some of them grew as protest movements (looking at PODEMOS), some as shifts within the parties – from which angle the campaign of Jeremy Corbyn is a very interesting issue to study.

The new political consensus around austerity among the mainstream forces meant that the dividing lines fall nowadays not alongside the traditional ideological divisions, but rather on the border of what is inside of the (political, partisan, economic) ‘system’ and the society points is particularly tough on the centre left. Herewith it lost its traditional characteristics as the actual “protest party”.

But although this is a harsh assessment, in fact there is still something more depressing to say. Along with the loss of this “traditional feature” – the most difficult to recuperate is the loss of credibility and public trust. This is the one that is measured by numerous polls and that is retrievable in the electoral results. And this creates a specific challenge. There is no doubt by now that the current levels of inequalities will lead to another socio-economic disaster. The societies suffering under austerity policies are becoming more and more divergent, young people see less and less opportunities to develop and look hopefully into the future. There is a popular awareness than in those rainy day what we need in fact is more support, more incentives and more investments – but they simply do not trust that any of the actors within the system would be able to manage those needs properly.

What surprises the most is how quickly that all happened, while there has been and there is a potential for a different course of events. The centre left has at this point more expanded possibilities to formulate an alternative project conceptually wise than it has had ever before. Its own programme put once upon a time fundamentals

to emancipate people while enabling universal access to education on all the levels, which boosted the group of those, who are named as “intellectuals”. Vast of the academics, researchers, experts and commentators of the contemporary times affiliate and identify with “progressivism”, and even more – many of them engage in the ‘renewal debate’ either directly or through social democratic think tanks. Is that then so, as Gerassimos Moschonas put it, that there is no crisis of idea but there is a crisis of political translation?

I would imagine that the frustration about the course of those developments is something that you especially would share with me. It is grieving indeed and I would not be surprised to find you angry at this point thinking “ok, since it has been examined, since all the wrongdoings are identified – where is the potential for improvement? Why to carry on engaging?” and that is a question that I want to answer in these last minutes. Especially that similarly as Kuhn, I think that such a powerful emotion – even if at this point a negative one – can led to a sparkle of motivation and then perhaps event to a flame of revolt – and this would surely at least lighten up the spirits. How? Let me call upon a very concrete example of the **FEPS Next Left Research Programme**.

It was established in June 2009. **To begin with, it was just a title of one seminar – which was called for after the European elections 2009 that had brought disastrous results for the centre left.** We are in the UK – and you may remember that that was the absolute bottom of the bottom outcome, when the traditional strongholds would no longer be upheld and taken over by for example UKIP. But in other EU Member States the situation did not look that much better – and was part of an overall decline, removal from the governance and grieving periods. **Hence soon after the first session devoted to the assessment of why what happened had happened, we were onto something larger. We simply needed to investigate why the crisis of the movement and what could be done about it.**

This is how our ‘renewal debate’ began with an ambition of not being yet another ritual exercise of self-criticism, self-pity and self-help – but actually to lead to constructive conclusions and proposals for the future. **The fact that it was designed to be a pan-European conversation was an important innovative aspect, especially that in those days there was much said that the renewal of the progressive movement is mutually co-dependent from the renewal of the European idea and project as such.**

That format used the specific country situations as case studies, but did not allow to drown in negativism or particularism – it incentivized the debate on what we learn from each other and hence for the future. If I could say so – this has proven always to be the asset of the programme, while we needed to translate it into the larger processes later on. What was key in balancing different aspects of the debate (pragmatism versus idealism, abstract concepts versus political proposal etc.) was the person of the Chair of the Programme, Dr Alfred Gusenbauer – who himself is a former Prime Minister of Austria and lecturer at Harvard and Columbia Universities.

His leadership and the support of the institute led by him – the Renner Institut – was crucial and invaluable.

The first thing that we needed to do was to create a junction to enable a politicized academic debate to take place. It wasn't easy, as the social democratic movement is by definition a pluralistic one. On the top of that, in 2009 the memories of the Third Way and the opposition to it were not abstract, and hence the debate that once caused a split already looked likely to continue. It run a danger of becoming a struggle in between those who would think that pursuing the Third Way agenda we drifted too far from the traditional policies and those who would say that we did not move far enough. Plundering this avenue was at best redundant, especially that it was not about "assuming responsibility" – which all the social democrats shared and contemplated. **The only way by which we could change the terms of the debate was to reorient it on the future and in a spirit of mutual respect try to contribute to shaping new chapter instead of reviewing the previous one.**

In practice it meant that we were not interested in pursuing the typical line of stating that the situation was caused by us "having abandoned our principles" and that now, wiser by that assessment, we will return and pursue them. Instead, we concluded that "every time needs its own answers" and we embarked on a mission on defining the meaning of the centre-left values so that they could serve as a set of guideline for the modern times.

The research took our Focus Group over a year. Its set up was a gathering of 15 post-doctoral researchers, who following their expertise took on the questions "what are our values" from respectively different angles. The four closed meetings served peer-review of the gradually developing papers, whilst at the same time the results have been continuously crosschecked through so called national round tables. These would be the debates organized in cooperation with FEPS members in the respective countries. **Their programmes and list of speakers would enable us in this initial stage to discover what are the main points of interest in different regions for the renewal debate and would allow us to meet with researchers, politicians, civil society representatives – who would not be yet a part of our initial data base.** Herewith the programme started living its' own life – and some, as for example Portuguese Res Publica, would become so enthusiastic of it – as to established a sort of a "Next Left" movement with their own website.

The diverse profile of the Focus Group enabled its members to analyse the same issue – progressive values – from very different angles. Already mentioned and present here Remi Bazillier was in charge of looking at the meaning of values in economic context, trying to figure out if for example progressives could gain grounds by making solidarity a term of political economy again. Dimitris Tsarouhas, who is a professor of political sciences and expert in trade unions' movement, looked at the question of if the understanding of the values still connects labour parties and the trade unions. Patrick Diamond analysed the public attitudes towards selected values-based policies. I worked on the narrative that the socialist parties have used in their respective programmes and so on. **By the end of the year we were proud to present**

at a European Socialists Programmatic Convention a book (vol. IV of the FEPS Next Left Book Series, which now is awaiting 10th volume) – and we were in fact becoming the reference point for the parties and think tank on that matter. This led to further requests for written and oral contributions, and most profoundly was the background reason for which we played a key role in drafting the first PES Fundamental Programme, which was adopted a year later.

Hence, following the request of IIPPEE organisers and my own promise from the beginning, I think that this very much shows a concrete example of how the ideas can be turned into proposals and how those then can be translated into binding political guidelines. One needs expertise, innovative take on and courage to open up the debate – through which others can engage, perhaps even contest – but definitely be given a chance to consider.

In that sense the momentum is something that counts as well. **Identifying it is crucial in order to make “activism” not only about being active – which in itself is of course very relevant – but cannot be sustained, unless the participants see advancement.** The progress has to be a continuous one, bringing along the new objectives and causing a state of permanent re-invention.

That was also a principle we have adopted with the FEPS Next Left. The first years made us realize that next to the debate on *what we wish to offer as social democrats*, the key point was *how* we would like to do that. The analyses were depressing – showing that our parties were declining in terms of numbers of members and sympathizers, that we were failing to attract younger generations and generally were attached to these ideas of partisan life that were at best nostalgic, but could not accommodate the changed society of different aspirations. This was the reason for us to create another Working Group – which would look specifically at the partisanship. Its’ establishment coincided with the 20th anniversary of the Maastricht Treaty and was a good starting point to look at the questions of politicization of Europe from the transnational parties perspective.

The group constructed herewith worked in parallel to the earlier mentioned Focus Group. Their focus remained to begin with the cooperation among social democrats regarding Europe, ways of involving citizens and following the earlier research also the meaning of principles such as solidarity, respect and mutual understanding. **Since the group had a different profile – it was quite devoted to the tangible proposals and was the platform where we came up with the first operational model on how the so called Top Candidates – the revelation of the 2014 European Elections – could be selected. We did not make a specific recommendation – but presented all possible options – from the open primaries towards the closed nomination of the presidents of the transnational parties and the impact each of the chosen ways would have. The meaning of that was enormous – and for a long time this paper was quoted by all sources, Wikipedia included, as the most comprehensive manual. It was commented on by bloggers, who find it easy to carry because of its practical approach.** And nonetheless it was used by different campaigns – as said, the initial work did not provide any clear recommendation

which path to chose – but as it started to live its own life, it was argued to be in favour of one or another option. To that end it was what opened the actual statutory debate in the Party of European Socialists – our interlocutor and gave fundamentals for the procedure that was eventually adopted.

The examples where we translated our research into proposals and the ways they transcended into politics were of course of a great importance, as they offered a political credibility. This one we however needed to keep on matching with the academic one and here many efforts have been done in order to open up new channels of cooperation with renowned Universities. That is how the programme made its way to be auspices under which exchanges were held at Harvard Law School, at Brown University, at Oxford University, at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona etc. This was key to consequently keeping the feature of the initiative – which was a politicized research programme. **It was of course the question of scholarly recognition, but perhaps even more vitally about seeing in how far we can break through the mainstream approach in the world of academia and inspire the debate on new ideas there. The recent book of Michael Kennedy ‘Globalizing Knowledge’ – published by Stanford University – devotes a grand chapter to this specific dimension of the FEPS Next Left Research Programme, which if you allow me this small commercial break here – I would like to recommend to you.**

These are essentially three examples that I would like to offer in terms of how a work of organization like ours with the involvement of scholars like yourselves can lead to specific political transformations. They respectively show how one can conceptualize a change of narrative, a change of method and a change of an intellectual mood. The key to that has always been openness of the formula, orientation on the future and readiness to continuously readjust, while identifying the momentums.

I have talked to you about the main organizational pillars – from Focus Group, through Working Group, National Round Tables, Academic Symposiums and FEPS Young Academic Networks. I have shown how the processes fed into the political developments and how they provided the impulses grasping the momentums. I have mentioned the role of the publications – FEPS Next Left Books with the 9 – almost 10 – volumes and could expand the list referring to different articles and pamphlets – here also with my very favourite series of “Winning for Real” with a question mark at the end. But I would like to finish here by making a remark on the state of the programme just now.

It is exciting, as we are in the transformative moment. The political reality around us has profoundly changed – debate on “renewal” is sadly often becoming a debate on “decline”, the talks on “being bolder” are done cautiously as radicalism became “dirty word claimed by others” and the debate on “winning to transform” is in fact much more focused on “not loosing and sustaining”. There is no reason to get discouraged by that – and rather as before – to take it as a motivating, inspirational thing. That is also why we have decided to benefit from all we have

learnt and applying to us the same principle as to social democracy – the one of a permanent reinvention – we are about to refocus again.

We think that our role is to steer the conversation towards the question of a Social Europe. Having at hand two grand agendas – Lisbon and EU2020 – one progressive and one conservative favoured – we simply have to find ways to draw our conclusions and come with a different, plausible but also inspirational promise. We need to review all that we said about the paradigm shift – and pin down its modern concept, while keeping the core value of solidarity and equality in our minds. We need to bust the criticism of the welfare state – and show the ways it can be reinvigorated as a part of the European Social Model. We need to become innovative, inspirational and ambitious – holding up to the promise of minimums, but showing also a new hopeful horizon to the ambitions. We need to be able to set a perspective for each and for all in the very diverse society – reclaiming a progressive take on the inequalities’ debate. And the outcome of this work should in fact be the intellectual backbone of the proposal that the European Citizens are entitled to expect from the progressives ahead of the 2019 European Elections.

In order to achieve it however – it is essential that the dialogue broadens. And this is why once again I would like to say “thank you” for the invitation, thanking you for a chance to present some aspects of our work in this very “output” oriented manner and express the hope that this may, as in Cassablanca, be a beginning of a beautiful political sciences – political economists friendship.