

The Split of the European Left and the Future of transform! europe: Challenges and Perspectives for 2025

Sunday 2 February 2025, by [FERRE Marga](#), [GAZIBARA Štefica](#) (Date first published: 29 January 2025).

What are the key challenges facing the European left today, and how can unity be built in the face of growing divisions? [Marga Ferré, President of transform! europe](#), shares her insights on the ideological and structural dynamics shaping the left across Europe. In this interview, conducted by Štefica Gazibara, transform! europe's web and newsletter editor, Ferré reflects on the foundation's role as a platform for dialogue, solidarity, and action amidst the rising influence of the far right.



Cover photo: Marga Ferré at the Summer University of the European Left 2024. Source: EL Social Media.

Štefica Gazibara: Following the European elections in June 2024, the European Left appears increasingly divided. In your view, what triggered this division? Does it reflect the structural and ideological conflicts within the Party of the European Left (EL)?

Marga Ferré: I think it is good to put that statement into perspective. After the European elections, in France, the entire left united under the New Popular Front and won the elections. Moreover, the Left group in Parliament increased its influence by bringing in parties that were not represented before, such as the Five Star Movement. There are divisions and diversity in the European left, which is not an exceptional situation. What is exceptional is the creation of another party of the European left and the sense of alarm that I, at least, feel about the increasing hegemonic influence of far-right discourse and governments.

For some years now the left in Europe has been undergoing a process of division. As this coincides with the years in which we have been suffering from the growth of the extreme right, I am tempted to link the two facts, but that would be an oversimplification. Last year was particularly illuminating during what I call the 'time of splits': In September, the Party of the European Left split, resulting in the creation of another European party, the European Left Alliance (ELA). The fact that there are now two European left parties gives us the measure of the problem.

This process partly follows the wake of splits in Germany, with the creation of a new party emerging

from Die Linke, the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW); the Greek New Left born from a split in Syriza; the splits in Spain or the traditional divisions of the Italian left. Of course, each debate, each country, each situation is different, but we can find points of unity and differentiation in the following elements that run through the debates of the European left (and beyond our continent):

The first point of contention is war, especially in Ukraine and expressed in the meta-signifier of being for or against sending weapons, or espousing positions that are interpreted as pro-Russian or approving the role of NATO. This is the reason for the split of the Nordic and German left parties; in the latter case, the genocide in Gaza is what has generated ruptures.

But perhaps more interesting for the reader is the second reason I think can shed light on this period of splits, which was synthesised by Professor Michael Holmes of the University of Lille in transform's [Strategy Seminar](#) held in October 2024: the political distance that existed in previous decades between social democracy and the radical left has been narrowing. In some countries there is a very fine division for voters between the left, social democracy or the greens: they are becoming indistinguishable for the audiences they are addressing.

When I problematise the tendency to be part of the mainstream (which runs through part of the European left and underlies this period of splits) I don't mean this as a criticism of being in the institutions. On the contrary, I strongly argue that the left has to contest spaces everywhere, institutions and governments included.

The problem I am pointing out is not being in such institutions or governments, what I am pointing to is that, when these spaces are entered, part of the left may be afraid to look excessively institutionalised - or, on the contrary, be tempted by a high degree of institutionalisation and thus be afraid to follow political tendencies not acceptable to the contemporary bourgeoisie.

The problem is not being *in* the institutions or instances of power; rather, the problem is seeing the world ("[outside the Palace](#)", as Pasolini called it) from that vantage point. It is a problem because from the inside, the reality outside filtered through surveys, through the intentional mediation of the media, and therefore reality is analysed through a distorted lens, and in periods of extreme-right hegemony, this distortion can become perverse.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the central problem is the gap between political representation and the social changes within contemporary capitalism. This is very relevant since political parties are the electoral representation of class interests or class fractions. We have to know where we stand because appeals for unity have to be based on the unity of interests of a class that is today very diverse.

Vladimir Bortun, political scientist at the University of Oxford, did a study on the left in Europe and the need for unity and reached a conclusion with which I agree: "*that unity of action is not only compatible with, but inseparable from, fostering an internal culture of disagreement and debate. It is the pursuit of absolute agreement on absolutely everything that always ends in fragmentation and*

sectarianism.“

Bortun recalled that “*The best years of the Second and Third Internationals were characterised precisely by this duality of internal differences and external unity*”. There is no reason why the European left cannot do the same today, if not better.

What programmatic differences do you see between the newly founded European Left Alliance (ELA) and the Party of the European Left Party (EL)? Could this division ultimately strengthen or weaken the left in Europe in the long term?

Rather than talking about divisions, I prefer to talk about building unity, based on the conviction that this is necessary and that conflict builds unity through solid relations of solidarity. That is why I advocate a united front that brings together the margins and contradictions of society, in all its enormous richness; the forms that these front takes seem secondary to me.

It is not about generating fear, because fear does not build, it paralyses; but it is about understanding that the advance of the extreme right also reflects the our successes: feminism, anti-racism, pacifism, solidarity and the defence of our rights. They react brutally, as they lose the hegemony that enables human and environmental exploitation.

A better way of putting it is that it is the common task, the shared praxis, rather than the conflict that builds, that was the idea of the Popular Fronts in the 1930s. What I mean is that the model is already there, so I don't think it is particularly smart to start from scratch.

Adamism in politics, as in almost everything else, shows certain signs of narcissism which, by rejecting what came before itself in order to justify its new existence, can make completely unnecessary mistakes.

Political parties are essential actors. The separation—very characteristic of the beginning of the century—between parties and movements, as if they were two antagonistic spheres, has, fortunately, been synthetically overcome by the need for common action. Dividing those at the bottom of society is the speciality of the ruling class; reconstructing those fragments should be the business of the popular classes.

One way of doing this is by means of the famous intersectionality, which from my point of view is born of the contradictions between capital and labour, which is not the only contradiction in capitalism and often not even the most important one. In the present decade of this century it is clear that a key capital/life, capital/planet, and the empire/colonies contradictions are key, with the increasingly clear vectorial interrelation of all of them, so that any national project that aims to expand rights should, I suggest, learn to integrate them. To seriously integrate them, and that means address them comprehensively through political and social proposals (which traditionally we called the *programme*), something I believe is the task for our period and to which *transform! europe* can contribute.

***transform! europe* is the officially recognised foundation of the EL. What are the**

implications of recent developments for its work? How can its role as a platform for dialogue be ensured? And what does the concept of '*transform! europe for all*' mean to you?

transform! europe is an enormously rich network of foundations, think tanks, and theoretical journals that brings together organisations from 23 European countries (inside and outside the EU). In times of competing hegemony with the horrible values of the extreme right, I am sure that *transform!* will continue to be a space to stimulate new thinking and foster dialogue for the entire European left, which in fact is continuing to grow. This obliges us to work better and differently.

We start from exceptional moments in which xenophobia, anti-feminism, climate-denialism, and profound anti-progressivism are characterising a time in which the extreme right is gaining hegemony behind what I suspect is the social acceptance of authoritarian government.

The task of *transform!*, as a network of thought, is to dispute this hegemony and to advance the wealth of anti-capitalist, feminist, ecological and pacifist thought. While the legacy of history's anti-fascism activists is under dispute, we must defend their memory while projecting a future that inevitably has to be built on the idea that fascism will never again return.

We should feel very proud of what we are and what we have achieved, which though insufficient when measured against our deep horizons, nevertheless represent an indispensable heritage in times of fascist irrationality. Let us defend what we have achieved, which has not been little, as a basis for continuing to build, knowing, as we do, that the road has not been and will not be easy.

How are civil-society movements and initiatives—ranging from social and ecological campaigns to feminist and trade-union organisations—integrated into the work and projects of *transform! europe*? What role do such collaborations play in strengthening a united left perspective in Europe and what implications might this have for the future of *transform! europe*?

Marta Harnecker conceptualised what we need as follows: “an instance that understands politics as the art of building forces and that overcomes the old and deep-rooted error of trying to build a political force without building a social force”. In other words, unity, and the proposal that goes with it in a left-wing project, must have a social corpus to support it.

A few weeks ago, Angela Davis gave a wonderful talk in Barcelona in which she challenged us to think of hope not as a feeling, but as a construction. Hope as a discipline, she told us, that calls on us to work in a coordinated, orderly and systematic way to win, to empower people who suffer the consequences of contemporary capitalism in its many different injustices: housing, work, exploitation, extractivism, culture, sexism, racism, war, or evictions...

Every struggle counts, so helping, organising, and collaborating in any of these conflicts is a central task. The local level is of course essential because although the contradictions are global, the conflict manifests in the territories, in the concrete, in people's lives. From the local to the global: capitalism, sexism, climate change are global phenomena, but their manifestation is concrete in each time and place.

This is our task, and it's a beautiful task.

P.S.

• Transform. 29 Jan 2025:

<https://transform-network.net/blog/interview/the-split-of-the-european-left-and-the-future-of-transform-europe-challenges-and-perspectives-for-2025/>