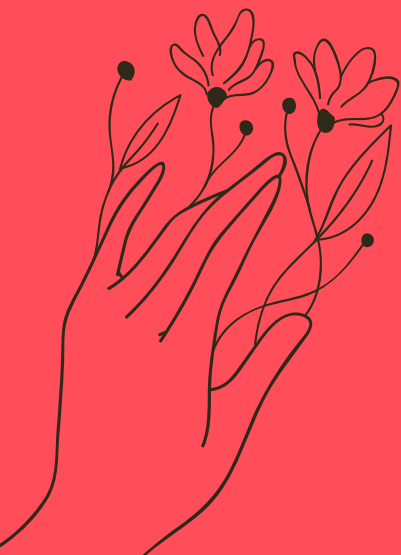


A perfect day to be brave

Bringing faith, dignity
and joy into politics for
a new social contract



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Published by Friends of Europe,
Square de Meeûs 5-6, 1000 Brussels, Belgium.
friendsofeurope.org

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*A primal scream and an elegy to our times,
this piece of work speaks to the current
state of our unpredictable, uncertain and
unstable world.*

*Friends of Europe thanks Ece Temelkuran
for agreeing to our request to provide this
powerful and emotional context for the
need for a Renewed Social Contract.*

*To future generations—a few words
to prove that we were not all in vain.*

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The darkest hour is the best time for a new beginning. Fears are weary, old limits thinned, and the mind is throbbing with liberation. That is where we are now—on the brink of the darkest hour—and it all depends on us to fall into the dark void of history or spread our wings towards what is beautiful and equally possible. Yes, we do have wings. Yet, if we keep still on this brink, paralysed by our fears and conventional limits of thinking, we will freeze. As a generation in world history, we will become redundant. Because all is far worse than we might want to admit. To begin with, we might have become too grotesque to sustain as human species.

**We might
have become
too grotesque
to survive.**

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Today, witnessing the political and moral incompetence before the apocalyptic state of affairs, young Europeans go as far as to ask whether we, as humans, are even worthy of existence. The loss of faith in humanity translates to the loss of faith in politics and public life. Many already believe that humanity has irredeemably broken its compass when the planet is in urgent need of rerouting. Many have lost hope that institutional politics can undertake the grand political work our times call for. Clearly, there are too many monsters to tame and too many darlings to kill for the necessary change. Yet if the job is not done, first, it is barbarity; then it is total extinction. Those who find such a description of our reality too dramatic are either in denial for various reasons or too privileged to see that individual salvation is no longer possible. To reverse the current, to survive politically and physically, and to be beautiful and humane enough to survive again, we need a new set of values. A new political and moral ground should begin to be built today. The ground rules must change.

Yet, we are stuck.

The political lethargy has long put us in a loop of superficial debates and band-aids that quickly become useless. The intellectual industry built to evade the necessary changes, as spectacular in their complacency as they may be, can no longer hide the fact that we need to dare for a radical change to remedy our apocalyptic reality. The political lethargy is not because there are not enough realistic ideas as to what and how to make the radical change. Yet, there is a famine of political stamina and willpower. Our faith in finding a new way of life is scarce. Hence, the political crisis that stems from our grander moral paralysis.

The iconic images of our moral paralysis are counting. It was Alan Kurdi, the dead Syrian baby washing ashore in 2015. And in the summer of 2023, when wildfires devoured the Greek island Rhodes, many kept kite surfing using the inferno as a backdrop. The iconic images of numbness were posted, once again, on social media with modern-day hieroglyphs—the crying emojis. Grand European languages have resigned from describing what we have become. Yet, our inconceivable apathy is not due to a collective decision not to care, but it is rooted in the sense of being too inconsequential as citizens and too helpless as individuals to act. We have been lowered to being non-factors of human history. So much so that every summer, when the refugees' dead bodies mingle with vacationers' in Mare Nostrum, we are not sure what we are *allowed* to do when we come across sea people asking for water. We live in a continent that, through exceptionally intricate legislation or shamelessly blunt terms, has criminalised solidarity, even if it is against the ancient laws of the seaman or the humane urge to help the dying fellow humans.

While Europe is confronted by such profound moral questions, our seemingly unmanageable reality is also conflated with other realities. Artificial intelligence and virtual reality are independent organisms shaping our understanding of the world. Humanity today asks the question, more often in fear than in wonder, whether we can control the multiple realities of our own making. And we are, in fact, aware that neither our moral compass nor our political stamina are fit to lead these realities, let alone steer their progress towards a more humane future. The unique humaneness we'd like to think of as our superiority to the limitless intelligence of AI and VR is hardly there.

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**Too many of us feel
small and weak
before the too-
muchness of moral
and political insanity.**

In every country of the old continent, as the uncertainties of our time scramble with the mercilessness and inhumaneness of our current system, a growing number of politicians who see the easy opportunity to exploit the collective anxiety rally the masses with loathsome aspirations. Many call it 'the crisis of democracy' or 'populism' and choose to believe that it is passing by political fancy. Many, equally mistaken, call the disintegrating societal system 'polarisation'. Mitigating terms do not suffice. The *radical evil* has once again taken root in European soil, and this time not as the *banality of evil* but the *evil of banality*. The new fascism has already become too powerful to be caricaturised by the political centre and too widespread to contain in the margins. This colourful form of fascism, with no boots or a uniform, has already terrorised our language and severely damaged the basic moral, scientific or social consensus alongside the centuries-old political institutions. Today's fascism is shaping the entire political sphere and irreversibly poisoning the agora.

Hence, too many of us immigrate to silence and try to build *communities* to protect ourselves from the maddening reality. We resign. Because we think of ourselves as non-factors before the dangerous phenomenon as much as we do before the wildfires.

**We resign because
we no longer have
a reason to act.
We've lost our faith.**

We've lost our faith in the current form of democracy and our will to have political agency in it. Because neoliberalism has long cancelled out the fundamental promise of democracy: equality. Although they are the youngest kids in history who unleashed greed and immorality, the Chicago Boys have finally devoured the last crumbs of the French Revolution. *Égalité* is nowhere to be found, *fraternité* is transactional, and *liberté* has been long limited to the consumer's freedom of choice. Hence, we know we don't count as citizens unless we have a hefty price tag on our foreheads.

The 20th century has been a century of failed grand political promises. And if we do not shake off the political lethargy now, we will be the generation who have let the promise of democracy be broken. And this profound question cannot be evaded by making a few fixes in the grand political machine. The Goliath of our own making has to be acknowledged, and the Davids of our age need to see that they are too many to be just the non-factors of history.

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We are too afraid to look at the monster of our own making and deal with it head-on. Our fears are mitigating our power to change. And the toxic darlings have become too deeply embedded in our existence to get rid of.

Our mainstream political fears are now too worn out to own. These fears that limit our thinking and our power to find genuinely new solutions were gifted to us during the Cold War when the world's current political and moral set-up was put together. They were solidified and cemented in our political system in the 1980s when, on both sides of the pond, the motto, "there is no alternative" (TINA), was forcefully made the natural order of things. It was then that words such as solidarity, true equality, altruism, public good, human love in political space and even the concept of singleness of truth had been wiped off from our political and moral lexicon. Profit, the Goliath of our age, was made the god. It was then democracy became the toy of the few, gradually leaving behind the many. That *many* today are quenching their anger by voting for the new fascism, which eventually will steal from us the last chance of changing the world for the better. That is why our reality today requires us to call all such shrewdly demonised ideas and ideals back to the debate to tear down the sanctity of the shameless Goliath, the profit, and to put our abusive darling, the free market, in its place.

Profit, the Goliath we've created, is not concerned with our maladies, and the abusive darling, the *unregulated (free) market*, cannot be bothered less by our sufferings. Their promise to care for everything—democracy included—has failed dramatically.

A PERFECT DAY TO BE BRAVE

We are already mourning in the future tense. We can already see the near future where all that is beautiful, natural and manufactured will be lost. Yet, neither the profit nor the unregulated market cares about the vanishing sea, the burning air, the deteriorating dignity of humankind, the demise of democratic institutions, the rule of law, our loss of faith in humanity and how all these losses over all trivialise politics. Yet, if we want to change the world and intend to begin this grand political reform in Europe, we need people to take back their political agency. They would only move if they believed that in the new reality, they would count as dignified individuals, and democracy would no longer be the theatrics of itself, operating without social justice and equality.

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The politicians, the intellect and the decision-makers need courage to mend the *heartless world*. Their courage can only be acquired if the masses are faithful enough to rally for this colossal change and to bring down the hegemony of worn-out taboos. And political faith, after a century of failed political promises, is only possible if a new social contract is put at the table. A new social contract in which the privileged few will be obliged to be concerned with the public good as much as the many are.

**A new social contract,
this spectre of an idea
is already haunting
young and colourful
new Europe.**

The boundaries in our political thinking, our worn-out fears or our invented sanctities do not interest the new generation. After pleading with the decision-makers to change the course of history for a while, they now see the main obstacle before their desire to mend our *heartless world*. They even ask for the rights of nature, the trees and the fish, the water and the birds. They stare, without a blink, at the greed of the big capital and the lack of courage of the decision-makers in their attempts to lessen the damage. Soon, their politics will be filled with rage unless the decision-makers see the trend and act accordingly.

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**A new social contract
in Europe cannot only
aspire to survive. It
must set the rules to
survive beautifully.**

Political and moral beauty can only be achieved when the joy of dignity is at the centre of our politics. Dignity can only be intact when the good of the many is the North Star of our political work. To begin this political work, first, we need to rid ourselves of the neoliberal morality and the dominant definition of human in our current system. We are not the self-centred, selfish, bastardly beings we are made to believe. We are beings that cannot survive without meaning and human love. If you are too afraid to be considered naïve when putting love and meaning, and thus, dignity, at the centre of our political thinking, just remember that this premature fear has been gifted to

you by the cynicism that is the wingman of TINA. If faith in humankind sounds too abstract, please remember that fascism is the total loss of faith in politics, thus humans and their endless capacity to be and to create beauty. If this radical shift in our political morality seems undoable to you, please remember that we have nothing to lose but our apocalyptic future. And never forget that we can begin making the necessary radical change by having faith in ourselves and each other. Faith, as the most magical invention of the human mind, does not rely on proof but requires miracles. And it is now time for us to create miracles. We can only do it if we decide to be simply humans.

Today is a perfect day to be brave and begin the new. The old is dying, everyone keeps saying, and the new is not born yet. *Between occurs the morbid symptoms* said a wise guy once. But there are enough of us, and we are beautiful enough to prevail over the morbid symptoms and claim the day to begin the new, the humane and the just. Being brave is the beginning of liberation. It feels like a fall until you remember you have wings. Humans are the species that have the largest wings. Remember. Just don't forget.

