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Europe

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This report was initially presented at the CADTM International Council meeting held in Liège and Brussels from 13 to 16 October 2025.

The political situation in Europe is very bad.

The far right is in government in several countries: Italy, Hungary, Belgium (the Prime Minister is from the NVA), Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Croatia, not to mention Sweden (where the far right, without being part of the minority government, supports it). [\[1\]](#)

The far right has succeeded in becoming the leading political force in Italy (Brothers of Italy), France (RN), Hungary (Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Union), the Netherlands (Geert Wilders' PVV Partij voor de Vrijheid) [\[2\]](#) and Austria (FPÖ). The Vlaams Belang (neo-fascist) in Flanders was the party that received the most votes in the European elections in June 2024, ahead of the Flemish far-right party NVA.

The Presidency of the European Commission (led by German conservative Ursula Von Der Leyen) reached an agreement with the far-right parliamentary group led by Georgia Meloni of Italy, which allowed this far-right parliamentary group to obtain a position as Executive Vice-President of the European Commission and three committee presidencies. [\[3\]](#) This is extremely important because the three committees that Meloni's European parliamentary group has obtained are agriculture, budget and petitions. As a result, petitions from the European people, such as attempts to obtain a referendum, will be handled by a committee chaired by the far right. [\[4\]](#)

Ursula Von Der Leyen is supported by four European parliamentary groups: 1. the European People's Party group (CDU-CSU Germany, PP Spain, ND Greece, etc.); 2. the Socialists and Social Democrats group (French PS, French-speaking Belgian PS, Flemish, Spanish, Greek, German SPD, etc.); 3. the RENEW group, which includes Macron and the French-speaking Belgian MR, which is very right-wing; 4. The European Greens group [\[5\]](#). As mentioned above, Ursula Von der Leyen, supported by these four groups, has entered into agreements with Meloni's far right (i.e. the ECR group, of which the far-right Flemish NVA is a member). This is extremely serious.

A recent positive note: in the Irish presidential elections on 24 October 2025, Catherine Connolly, the candidate supported by the entire left, was elected. She opposes Ireland's membership of NATO and criticises what she calls the 'militarisation of the European Union'. Catherine Connolly supports migrants' rights, denounces the ongoing genocide in Gaza, defends public services and wants a housing programme for the working classes.

The European Union is:

- directly complicit in the genocide carried out by the neo-fascist government in Israel;
- applying and reinforcing an INHUMANE migration policy;
- significantly increasing arms spending and strengthening its participation in NATO by submitting itself even more to the leadership of the United States;
- abandoning its commitments to combat climate change and the ecological crisis;
- increasing illegitimate public debt;
- reinforcing austerity policies directed against the working classes;
- is in favour of increasing gifts to big business and the richest 1%;
- is significantly reducing the amounts allocated to what is called development aid;
- is continuing to sign free trade agreements (such as the one with MERCOSUR) while applying a protectionist policy towards China.

National governments in and outside the EU are stepping up repressive policies against protests.

The economic situation in Europe is very bad: economic growth is very low (almost zero). We are not at all fans of growth, but from a capitalist point of view, having growth close to zero is a problem for European capitalists. [6]

The economic sectors that are growing are mainly those involved in the production of weapons of war.

In general, there is a sharp increase in poor-quality jobs with precarious contracts.

The increase in public and private debt in Europe

It is clear that there is a very sharp increase in both public and large private corporate debt. The indebtedness of the working classes has also increased, given the downward pressure on real incomes, whether in terms of wages or social benefits and allowances. The loss of purchasing power is offset by greater recourse to debt on the part of working-class households.

The argument that public debt has reached record levels and is becoming unsustainable for the budget is once again being systematically used by governments that are in fact responsible for the increase in debt. They have increased public debt because they refused to make the large private companies and the major shareholders who continued to enrich themselves pay for the costs of the crises caused by capitalism. Examples include Big Pharma, GAFAM, energy production and distribution companies, food and distribution companies, banks, and arms manufacturers, all of which have made huge profits.

So, by not increasing taxes on large corporations and continuing to give gifts to the richest, the public authorities have increased public debt.

In 2025, France's public debt reached 114% of gross domestic product, Italy's was 138%, Greece's 152%, Belgium's 107%, Spain's 103% and the other countries were generally below 100%. A large majority of European Union countries are well above the 60% of GDP stipulated in the Maastricht Treaty. We question the validity of comparing debt stock to GDP, but since this ratio is used by governments and the treaties governing the EU, it constitutes a means of measurement, however flawed it may be.

What is certain is that, contrary to what the right wing claims, the increase in public debt is not caused by excessive social spending or wage expenditure in the civil service or public investment in the fight against climate change.

The increase in public debt is the result of two factors: 1. a policy of increasing illegitimate spending, such as public aid to large companies and an increase in public orders to the arms industry, Big Pharma (during the pandemic), etc. 2. a policy of insufficient public revenue due to the refusal to tax the rich and their (super) profits.

The right wing, which was looking for an argument to take austerity policies and attacks on the gains made since the Second World War to a new level, is seizing on this situation to argue that cuts in social spending and public investment, particularly in relation to the fight against climate change and the ecological crisis, must be increased.

They also took advantage of the situation to reduce development aid spending. We had no illusions about how

development aid is carried out, but we realise that reducing it is not in the interests of the peoples of the South: when Trump shut down US Aid altogether, it had disastrous effects on the health of millions of people in Africa who were receiving treatment for AIDS, for example.

Those in power are deliberately dramatising the issue of debt

The issue of debt is being dramatised, and we must denounce this. We are not facing the prospect of collapse or an inability to repay. What is needed from the left's point of view is a government that would declare, on the basis of a citizen-participatory debt audit, that part of the public debt is illegitimate or even odious, and that a significant portion of it must be cancelled. We would like to see a left-wing government implementing policies that benefit the population and making huge public investments in the fight against the ecological crisis take such a decision.

For example, the European Central Bank still holds nearly €3.6 trillion in public debt securities from eurozone countries, or just under 20% of each country's public debt. If the ECB were to cancel these debts, there would be a reduction of around 20% and the argument for pursuing austerity policies would fall away. Indeed, as long as the ECB is a creditor of a significant portion of the debt, it can exert pressure on progressive governments that would like to pursue anti-austerity policies.

It should be remembered that in 2021, an international appeal for the cancellation of public debts held by the European Central Bank (ECB) attracted considerable attention. The [opinion piece titled 'Cancel the public debt held by the ECB and 'take back control' of our destiny'](#), published on 8 February 2021, appeared simultaneously in major media outlets across eight European countries on 5 February 2021.

In December 2021, an international appeal revisited the same subject: [Call: Why Eurozone countries' debt to the ECB must be cancelled](#), CADTM, 7 December 2021, signed by Éric Toussaint, Sonia Mitralias, CADTM Europe, Paul Murphy, Miguel Urbán Crespo, Andrej Hunko, Cristina Quintavalla, Manon Aubry, Leïla Chaibi and others.

This is an extremely important issue when it comes to discussing alternatives. But of course there are also the debts claimed by big capital, which buys public debt securities, and in this case, progressive governments that are elected should take measures to cancel/repudiate them.

Now, if the right wing remains in power, it will use the argument of the amount of public debt to pursue more severe austerity policies. This will in no way solve the economic problems of the European Union, but it will increase big capital's capacity to attack labour.

It will not solve the structural economic problems of the European Union, but in the battle between capital and labour, capital will score points thanks to attacks carried out in the name of the need to make cuts in order to repay the public debt.

The issue of public debt is therefore a central one. And on this point, in response to some on the left who say that there is no public debt problem, CADTM must say that this response is too simplistic, that there really is a public debt problem because a large part of it is illegitimate.

Yes, the amount of public debt is not dramatic, but it is very significant and unjustified. This public debt must be radically reduced. Not by accelerating repayments, but on the contrary by largely refusing to make repayments and

by making big capital – which has systematically profited from it – pay the cost of these debt cancellations in order to free up resources for a different type of policy and a different model of human development that respects ecological balances.

The level of popular resistance and international solidarity

There have been significant social protests in 2025: in France, Greece, Belgium, Italy, Serbia, etc. There was a strong social protest in Ukraine [on the theme of the fight against corruption](#) in July 2025.

There is a very significant movement of solidarity with the Palestinian people, with millions of people mobilizing and continuing to mobilize in Europe against genocide. This is very positive.

There is also a movement of solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

Movements of solidarity with migrants are significant but insufficient.

Mobilisations for climate justice have declined, particularly because the priority has shifted towards solidarity with the Palestinian people, which is entirely understandable.

Assessment of anti-illegitimate debt movements in Europe

Anti-debt movements have not regained momentum over the last three years, despite the increase in debt and the increase in austerity policies.

At the social movements university held in Bordeaux from 23 to 26 August 2025, there was a [good turnout from CADTM Europe and Africa](#).

The CADTM Autumn Meetings held in Liège from 10 to 12 October 2025 were a great success, with more than 300 participants, bringing us closer to the mobilisation capacity we had in 2015-2018.

Nevertheless, in terms of strengthening CADTM in Europe, there is still a long way to go to reach the level we had before the coronavirus pandemic.

Conclusions

1. Europe is experiencing an authoritarian and reactionary drift, marked by the normalisation of the far right and its integration into the power structures of the European Union, with serious consequences for democracy, social rights and civil liberties.
2. The European Union acts as a central player in the neoliberal and militarist order, prioritising the interests of big

capital, the arms industry and NATO, to the detriment of social justice, climate justice and human rights.

3. Public debt is a political instrument, not an inevitable technical problem: its growth is the result of conscious decisions by governments that protect the beneficiaries of crisis capitalism and shift the costs to the working classes.

4. Austerity policies do not solve Europe's structural problems, but rather deepen inequality, weaken public services and reinforce capital's offensive against labour.5. The auditing and cancellation of illegitimate debt is a key condition for a progressive alternative, along with fair taxation, a break with militarism and massive public investment geared towards ecological and social transition.

5. Despite the adverse context, there are dynamics of resistance and solidarity, which show the persistence of a social and popular Europe capable of articulating struggles against war, racism, austerity and climate injustice.

1 January 2026

Source: [CADTM](#).

PS:

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