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The Relaunch of Europe

Mapping Member States' Reform Interests:
Executive Summary

Europa

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Institut für Europäische Politik (Institute for European Politics, IEP) is one of the leading foreign and European policy research centres in the Federal Republic of Germany dedicated to the study of European integration.

Further information on the project can be found here:

www.relaunch-europe.eu

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The »RelaunchEU« project maps the scope for reforms in the EU-27. Experts from all member states except the United Kingdom have delivered country issues, in which they evaluate whether national governments and relevant progressive parties¹ support 12 concrete reform proposals in the policy areas of Social Union, Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), Defence Union and asylum and migration as well as the general question of flexible integration. The country issues and the comparative analysis, including the maps, can be downloaded on the website: www.relaunch-europe.eu.

The study found four flagship projects that are widely supported by both progressive parties and national governments in the EU-27:

- Upward convergence of national social security schemes;
- Fighting tax fraud and tax evasion on a European level;
- Extending EU military planning capabilities;
- Extending competences of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG).

These four projects have the potential to become key drivers for further reforms of the European Union (EU), as they bridge dividing lines between member states. Upward convergence of national social security schemes and fighting tax fraud and tax evasion on a European level are supported by governments and parties from proponents of a stability union as well as supporters of a fiscal union. Agreement on these two projects could pave the way for further compromises on reforming the EMU. Extending EU military planning capabilities is supported in the East and West among pro-European and rather sceptic member states regardless of how they position themselves concerning the role of NATO in European defence and EU policy

towards Russia. Finally, the extension of competences of the EBCG is a project that can overcome the deadlock in reforming the Common European Asylum System as supporters and strong opponents of the quota system for re-locating refugees in the EU support the proposal.

While there is wide agreement on the usefulness of these four flagship projects across the party-lines, there is clear disagreement concerning the idea of a fiscal capacity for the euro zone. While most governments are hesitant to support it, fearing that it might constitute a first step towards permanent fiscal transfers, an overwhelming majority of progressive parties clearly see the need for some form of public risk-sharing to stabilise the EMU. Therefore, the project of introducing a fiscal capacity might become a progressive flagship project for the Social Democratic Parties and a means to delineate themselves clearly from conservative ideas to reform the EMU. Yet, any design of a future fiscal capacity needs to take concerns on fiscal autonomy, permanent transfers and moral hazard serious.

Taking the broader perspective of all 12 reform proposals covered, the study reveals the existence of a, however shrinking, »inclusive avant-garde« of five EU founding states (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy², and Luxembourg) and Spain³ that are willing to cooperate on nearly all reform projects in all policy areas. However, they do not intend to form a core Europe that advances together, while leaving other states behind. On the contrary, the five flagship projects and further reform proposals open up possibilities to advance European integration by including further partners on a flexible basis with differing coalitions for different policy areas. However, the outcome of the recent election in Italy shows how limited the window of opportunity for further reforms is. Therefore, the inclusive avant-garde needs to relaunch the European integration very soon.

¹ Parties that are members of the Party of European Socialists or the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament, which received a minimum share of five percent of the votes in the previous European or national elections. If a party fulfills this criterion, but is not a relevant actor in the national public debate anymore, it was deleted from the sample based on the judgement of the projects' country expert.

² The data for Italy were collected in September 2017. Due to the European policy of the new government, Italy is not part of the »inclusive avant-garde« any longer.

³ The data for Spain were collected in September 2017. They show that the now ruling progressive party is even more pro-European than the previously ruling conservative party.

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