



OPEN EUROPEAN DIALOGUE

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Highlights from the Conversation

MP Open Call – *European Tour de Table*
6 February 2024

As Europe braces for what is anticipated to be a ['super-election year' in 2024](#), many countries and policymakers alike stand at a crossroads, tasked with navigating a complex interplay of political forces and societal aspirations.

Amidst this dynamic landscape, on 6th February, **21 policymakers from Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Ukraine** gathered for a *European Tour de Table*, where they shared insights into their countries' political landscapes, exchanged views and discussed challenges and perspectives ahead of an important year for European politics and societies.

Country Focused Insights

POLAND | “Our primary focus is the reinforcement of democracy.”

Poland's 2023 general elections marked a significant moment for the country's political life, witnessing widespread participation, particularly among [young people and women](#). With a turnout of 74.4%, [the highest since the country's transition to democracy in the 1990s](#), these elections underscored Poland's commitment to democratic principles and suggested the desire for a renewed political trajectory.

Reflecting on Poland's journey since 1989, discussions emphasized the importance of adopting a pan-European approach to addressing the complexities of critical political challenges while cautioning against political sides offering simplistic answers to complex political questions. As Europe grapples with various issues, including the war against Ukraine, enlargement processes, migration, and climate change, better and more communication between politicians and citizens is recognized as paramount for the country. This sentiment is echoed not only in Poland but also resonated with policymakers across Europe, underlining the necessity of **cultivating new channels of dialogue between politics and society**.

“When we're moving forward too fast, the lack of social acceptance can be used to turn to too simple answers, impairing our ability to find solutions.” – Member of the Polish Parliament

ITALY | Italy's most stable government in twenty years ahead of the European Parliament elections

With an [increase in migrant arrivals](#), over the course of 2023 the Italian government keeps prioritizing security and migration policy. Insights were shared on new migration agreements between Italy and neighboring countries, such as the one with [Albania](#).

Discussions also surrounded [possible upcoming constitutional reforms](#) in the country, with explorations into amendments that could lead to the direct election of the Prime Minister.

The current government is perceived as one of the most stable of the past two decades. However, challenges persist within the government coalition as political forces try to find a delicate balance between historical pro-European stances and traditional Euroscepticism among the coalition components.

As the European political stage takes shape ahead of the European elections in June 2024, discussions of potential alliances between political families across borders arose, suggesting a nuanced and dynamic period ahead. National parties may adopt different political stances at the EU level compared to their domestic agendas, adding to the complexity.

Emphasizing the need for the EU to prioritize initiatives supporting national stability and economic development, the government seems to show a commitment to extending peace and stability values to aspiring Union members, suggesting a nuanced stance beyond the reticence traditionally attributed to some parties within the governing coalition.

“The EU serves as a political framework, a region committed to safeguarding peace and stability. Its purpose extends beyond its borders, aiming to extend these values to other nations seeking entry into the EU.” – Member of the Italian Parliament

GERMANY | “We have democratic and socio-ecological change. We have some homework to do. Right now, we are facing our destiny.”

“The situation in Germany is at a crossroads. We have been hit by several crises – Covid-19, social tensions, the war against Ukraine and the following energy crisis. During the last decade, we missed the window of opportunity to do the necessary reforms, renew our economy, and make it more innovative and resilient.” – Member of the German Parliament

Tensions arise within the governing traffic light coalition between Greens, Social Democrats, and Liberals as parties navigate divergent priorities. Yet, amidst differences, there's a growing and renewed **recognition of the necessity for collective responses to the country's economic, security, and resilience challenges**.

Despite varying perspectives on European integration in different fora, particularly within the Franco-German partnership, participants discussed the reinforcement of Germany's belief that the EU remains a fundamental reference frame for cohesion, preparedness, and stability, particularly for security and energy policy questions.

Transparency and the importance of maintaining honesty and staying true to the goal of achieving resilience in the context of multiple crises are recognized as crucial.

During the *Tour de Table*, policymakers also exchanged views on a series of other pressing subjects for European politics:

1. **The Israel-Palestine conflict and the war against Ukraine**

Discussions centered on the persisting Israel-Palestine conflict in the Middle East and its reverberations across Europe, alongside deep concerns regarding the ongoing war against Ukraine.

As the second anniversary of the conflict against Ukraine approaches, participants had the opportunity to hear directly from Ukrainian policymakers, who provided invaluable insight into the country's current situation.

Political forces within the Ukrainian parliament keep working together to maintain a united front in the face of the prolonged war, emphasizing the importance of solidarity and resolve.

“Victory is what is crucial for us now.” – Member of the Ukrainian Parliament

The EU's support remains vital during this critical phase. The EU vote on 6 February 2024 regarding the [regulation to set up a Ukraine Facility](#) was widely welcomed as a pivotal step to deliver much-needed funding, demonstrating continued support and solidarity.

“We really appreciate all the effort of EU countries and thank them for the unity and support to Ukraine over these two years – It is very important for our country.” – Member of the Ukrainian Parliament

Parliament has been working through the invasion for the last two years. The presidential elections set to take place in March 2024 are confirmed to be infeasible for the country due to the ongoing martial law and logistical reasons.

Despite the challenges, Ukraine's political class has shown unwavering commitment by actively participating in the war effort, with thousands of politicians enlisted in active military duty. Tragically, the toll of the conflict has seen 75 casualties recorded among policymakers from various levels of government, including some parliamentary colleagues, who remained killed on the front lines.

2. **Farmers' strikes across Europe**

Attention was drawn to [farmers' strikes in Belgium, France, Germany](#), and the Netherlands, highlighting grievances related to [EU environmental standards on nitrogen emission](#) reduction. Beyond these specific regulations, concerns were raised about the broader stability and growth of European agricultural industries.

3. Hungary's political scene

Recent developments in Hungary included the country's agreement [to support the EU initiative to bolster resources in support of Ukraine's defense infrastructure against Russia](#). Additionally, discussion ensued regarding President Katalin Novák's controversial [pardon of a convicted individual](#), sparking political turmoil. Ultimately, Hungary was also highlighted as [the last member-state to ratify Sweden's NATO membership](#).

■ | Cross-border cross-party MP initiative

During the conversation, members of the Open European Dialogue expressed keen interest in connecting with colleagues to address the issue of the farmers' strikes in Europe and related environmental reforms.

Should you be interested in knowing more and/or contributing, please get in touch with Ronith Schalast at ronith@aproposgroup.org.

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