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What's wrong with you, Europe?



Sources: Rebellion

Europe is experiencing a hot winter. In February, trade union protests multiplied, particularly in Britain, France, Spain and Portugal. And in other countries there is growing discomfort over unresolved problems, such as extra-European immigration, which is increasingly restrictive.

In parallel, the Russia-Ukraine war, about to turn its first year on February 24, continues to generate negative economic repercussions and remains the stone in the shoe of a continent that looks with concern at its bleak economic prospects. All forecasts indicate that even if it manages to escape recession, European growth this year will be close to zero, there will be a further impoverishment of real wages and the already weakened social welfare state will suffer even more attacks.

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The protest speaks French...

For several years weeks, France is the scene of citizen mobilizations of the most spectacular of recent years. As of January 19, tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets to protest against the new proposal of the pension system, which plans to increase compulsory labour from 62 to 64 years of age, through increases partial until 2030.

The main cost of President Emmanuel Macron's proposed reform It will fall on the popular classes and, generationally, on those who They start working very young, at 18, 19 or 20 years of age.

At the same time as the Government tightens the social screw, the representative companies of the great French capital, such as TotalEnergise, Axa, Crédit Agricole, Carrefour, BNP Paribas, Electricité de France, among others, accumulate, tendentially, Significant gains. An emblematic example: in 2022 TotalEnergies recorded an operating profit of €36 billion, representing 000% higher than in 90. Popular anger has its argument in these Growing differences between large companies and the citizen "on the street".

On February 2021, the fourth inter-union mobilization called, according to the organizers, more than 11 and a half million people (2 million if you have in account of official information). That rally anticipated demonstrations in The whole country and the 1th and new day of national protest planned for the Thursday 5 (at the close of writing this article). In parallel, repeated Strikes in various sectors, including the railways, turn France into a country partially weakened in some of its daily activities, such as transport, schools and refineries.

And also Spanish and Portuguese...

Also in Spain and Portugal the social demand increased the second end of week of February. On Saturday 11, more than 250,000 people marched in Lisbon (which has a population of just over half a million people) convened by the teachers' unions, demanding fundamental improvements in the model education and wage policy.

A day later, almost 1 million demonstrators took to the streets of Madrid and other cities and regions of the country, such as Galicia, to demand substantial improvements to the system health and working conditions of health personnel. The promoters of the Madrid

concentration denounced that one in four people with a health problem fails to access consultations at the care level primary.

Not forgetting English

On Wednesday 1 of February, some 300,000 teachers in 23,000 schools in Britain went on strike called by the National Education Union (NEU). According to government figures, that 51.7% of state-funded schools partially or totally closed. The strikes also paralyzed the country's 150 universities, due to the protest of 70,000 teachers of the Union of Universities and Colleges. Union sources estimate that more than 500,000 workers joined that day to the measure of force.

The following Monday, the February 6, one of the most participatory strikes since it exists The British public health system, led jointly by dozens of thousands of nurses and paramedics. The fundamental claim: wage increases to counter high double-digit inflation that It breaks records in the last 40 years. Various media on the continent defined this second day as the largest in the 75-year history of the National Health Service (NHS). Between Tuesday 7 and Friday 10 The nursing sectors stopped again, then that of physiotherapists and finally that of the ambulance personnel.

Along with the teachers' strike earlier this month, civil servants and railway workers were halted in what is considered the largest social protest in the last decade. The Government, in addition to expressing its total unwillingness to negotiate with the unions, proposes to study new laws to limit the right to strike, thus anticipating a confrontational spiral with no apparent way out.

Dignity for immigrants

Black letters on yellow background: "Stop Dublin". Such were the colors of hundreds of posters hoisted by much of a demonstration in Bern the first Saturday in February. Convened in the Plaza Federal, in front of the headquarters of the Swiss Government, with this slogan the demonstrators denounced the Switzerland's abusive application of the 1990 Dublin Convention. Agreed between the countries of the European Community, Iceland, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Norway to regulate requests for political asylum and Adapted on several occasions, this agreement allows expulsion expeditiously to any asylum seeker to the signatory country where there is Entered the European continent.

According to Amnesty International, "Switzerland is one of the countries that most strictly applies the Dublin procedure". The human rights organization maintains that This excessive formalism is not only detrimental to mental and physical health. of the persons concerned, but also leads to violations of the fundamental and children's rights.

Mobilization in Bern, although not massive, was one of the most numerous in recent times in Relation to asylum. It has demanded greater understanding and flexibility in the Government, which takes advantage of certain prerogatives of the Dublin Convention to expel asylum-seekers, preferably to Croatia. The Demonstrators also denounced the measures of humiliation and violence repressive use by Croatian migration, in particular with those who come from sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

According to Amnesty International, last year Switzerland asked other European states, under the Dublin Convention, to take care of 4,936 asylum seekers, almost 1,000 more than in 2020, <https://www.amnesty.ch/fr/themes/asile-et-migrations/asile-en-suisse/docs/2022/faits-et-chiffres-2021>.

The theme of the migration occupies an important place both in the Swiss Confederation and in the rest of Europe; It is installed at the center of the political-ideological debate of society; Divides waters between the xenophobic extreme right and the sectors progressive and humanist, and reflects some of the great underlying tensions that envelop the Old World.

Economy frost

Although some analysts believe they will find not so negative signs in the European economic results of the first weeks of 2023, they still fail to counteract the forecasts of a very difficult year with the corresponding social repercussions, especially for the salaried and most vulnerable sectors of the continent.

"Europe is still in trouble." This is the title of an analysis published on 9th February by the Swiss website ALLNEWS, which specialises in economics, <https://www.allnews.ch/content/points-de-vue/une-europe-encore-en-difficult%C3%A9>. With the corresponding subtitle: "The energy crisis and the impoverishment of workers continue to penalize a Europe that fails".

However, its author, Christopher Dembik, Saxo Bank (Danish investment and investment bank) online commerce), notes that "we have been too pessimistic about the euro area" and recalls that "a few months ago, more than 90% of analysts They were certain of a recession in 2023."

Dembik argues that falling energy prices, absence of power cuts (result of both diversification of energy supply and winter temperatures not so low) and the resistance of some indicators Economic fundamentals (especially in Germany) determine the need for Review the outlook for this year.

Your analysis recalls that the initial projection of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the Eurozone in 2023 was negative. And he says his banking institution is convinced that the Europe of the euro could avoid recession this year and aim for a GDP growth from 0.3% to 0.4%. "A timid but significant improvement, and this may just be the beginning," says Dembik. However, his Analysis concludes by mentioning the points of tension that will continue to hit the economies of the region. Due to the yield of the European GI credit (Investment Grade) of 4%, for the first time in the last decade feels a increased credit pressure, which will affect companies that must access to new sources of funding. And, no less significant, the crisis Energy will return to the foreground in the face of the need to replenish stocks exhausted, which could lead to the increase in the prices of fuels in the coming months. The European Union will be able to find suppliers and importing, for example, liquefied natural gas from the United States, Australia or even Mozambique, but at a high price. And it is very likely that This energy problem affects an increase in inflation in the second half of the year.

Dembik's analysis, which expresses a macro financial-banking vision, concludes that the Chances of avoiding a recession "seem high." However, it acknowledges that Europe remains stagnant and the energy crisis remains one of the main problems, so "although the European Central Bank foresees a Substantial increase in wages, we see that in reality the workers are They are impoverishing in most countries." Additionally, that many companies who benefited from anomalous periods of negative interest rates They will now face reality and probably go bankrupt.

Moving on from analysis economic to political, the prospects anticipated by the Bank official Saxo are grim: "We are not optimistic... Sweden, which currently chairs the Council of the European Union, is focused on the war in Ukraine, while that the Spanish Presidency, in the second half of 2023, will be dominated by elections. Thus, the political landscape does not seem to hold big ambitions this year." The feverishness of the protest with which 2023 opened and intensified The first half of February is not fortuitous. To low projections Growth is added to an increasingly significant concentration of profits, especially in large transnationals. The balance of the Income redistribution is broken down and social protest is It intensifies and spreads in the streets.

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