



We must renew Europe for all Europeans

Sixty years ago, the people of Europe laid the foundations of the European Union — one of the most successful forces for peace, democracy, freedom, equality, prosperity and solidarity. It has had more than its fair share of success stories. There is a lot to be proud of and a lot to be celebrated -- but none of this can be taken for granted, and none of it is perfect.

Our world is changing enormously. Nationalism is on the march. Populist tensions are resurging. Distracted by narrow national interests, we risk losing sight of common priorities and solidarity among member states. The European Union is perceived as unable to tackle current challenges. The trust of European voters is being eroded, and the very foundations of our community are being challenged.

We are at a crossroads. We will only succeed in relaunching the EU if we take the direction of a more social, more just, more value-based Union now. As European affairs ministers from progressive parties, we have always stood for democracy, solidarity and fundamental rights. These values are at the heart of our shared European identity and they are the foundation on which we must build. Trust can only be restored by promoting genuine equality, fairness and social justice among Europe's entire people. Social progress must always mean upward convergence.

First, after years of economic stagnation, we need to put our economies back on track in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner, taking into account the digital transition. As progressives in Europe, we have already successfully pushed for more investment, but also for an approach which does not only aim for fiscal consolidation, but also prioritises growth and investment. Re-balancing these policies is not only in line with good management of public budgets but also strengthens their sustainability. We will continue to do so, to create upward social and economic convergence both among and within member states, and inclusive and sustainable growth. We will fight for fairness, including fiscal justice, and we will tackle tax fraud and evasion. We will step up our efforts to turn the euro into a driver for growth and convergence in the European Union by complementing and reforming the current Economic and Monetary Union.

It is high time to make our European Union into a social union, with strong workers' rights, gender equality, secure jobs and income, and tough measures to tackle youth unemployment, wage inequality and vast differences in living standards and social security. We want a minimum wage in all member states, while respecting national practices and the role of social partners in each country. We must work closely with these social partners to develop social protection and a welfare state that meets the needs of fast-changing economies. And we must not tolerate social dumping, wherever it occurs. For all these reasons, we want a strong European Union social pillar to be included in the forthcoming Rome declaration, and we look forward to taking new steps for fair jobs and inclusive growth when Europe's leaders meet for a major social summit in Sweden at the end of this year.

Social rights and inclusion in the EU must be fundamental to the single market, not just an afterthought. The EU's unique promise is for a model that combines economic growth with social security. We need more coherence in our policies to keep this promise alive. This means developing the single market further, reforming our economies, consolidating the public households, in doing so we must always take the social impact of our policies into account, and ask whether we stick to the goals we have set ourselves.

For example, we have still not achieved our aim of a 75% employment rate, reached our target for investment in research and education, or reduced gender inequality or the poverty rate to the level we all agreed on. Thus, as

progressives we will push further to rebalance our coordinated European policies to prioritise social security and social rights.

Europe must be relentless in supporting and defending democracy and the rule of law, both on our continent and abroad. If violations are confirmed, there should be consequences. Furthermore, we should position ourselves as international frontrunners on these issues – especially in an era where international action on climate change, sustainability and security are jeopardised by isolationist tendencies. A progressive Europe should set its own standards and demand equally high standards from its partners.

We must act to manage the refugee crisis. Europe has always been a continent of migration. We are determined to defend our values, as we always have, with a humanitarian, strong and efficient European asylum policy that includes fair responsibility-sharing mechanisms. We must also work with our neighbouring countries and other partners to tackle the root causes of migration, not just manage its effects. At the same time, it is crucial that we reinforce the control of our common external borders with the new European Corps of Border Guards.

The safety and security of Europe's citizens is a top priority – but it can only be guaranteed through cooperation and transparency. A common approach is the best way, especially in the fight against transnationally acting terrorism. But we must also fight to protect what we value in our societies – tolerance, openness and human rights – from those who would undermine it.

One thing is certain: the Europe of tomorrow will not be the same as the Europe of yesterday. New shared challenges – geopolitical shifts, widespread digitalization and the green transition – require new shared solutions. We need not fear new challenges if we stand united.

But we observe different levels of ambition among member states in developing the EU further to meet these challenges, not only as a result of Brexit. The level playing field is crystal clear: we have a treaty which applies to everyone, and which leaves room for some member states to work together more closely if a particular issue can be solved better together. We are convinced that common solutions and concrete results are the best way to deal with the current widespread critique.

Today's nationalistic tendencies will not solve any of these challenges. The EU is our answer to this globalized world and we will defend it against all threats current and future.

Signatories

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