

Congress document: 'Europe secures our Future'

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1. Our Union of success and hope

Europe has gone through a series of crises in recent years. And although the European project has seen setbacks and stagnation in the past, the current situation seems particularly serious. We find ourselves on the verge of a decisive moment: we can head towards a more fragmented Europe, or we can decide to turn the tide, (re)shape Europe to make it fit for the 21st century and deliver results that address the concerns of our citizens. The EPP is determined to choose the second option!

We should also not forget that choosing this path represents a challenge to rediscover our true identity. Seen from a wider perspective, European integration has been a success story. In these times of accumulating crises, it is important to be aware of this. The European Union has guaranteed peace, democracy and prosperity for its citizens and Member States for almost 70 years. It is still the greatest political achievement in history to serve the people of our continent. The European Union and Europeans themselves have turned the page of a tragic history by freeing ourselves from fascist and communist dictatorships. We have created a new image of Europe in the world, far removed from imperialism and colonialism. We aspire to become a regional and global actor, driven by our Judeo-Christian and humanist values and our Hellenic-Roman heritage, as well as by the values of the Enlightenment. We have improved the Single Market and enabled the free movement of people, goods, services and capital among Member States; we have created a monetary union and defended it amidst the challenges of a global economic and financial crisis. We have found our way back to economic growth and fiscal consolidation in most Member States. Furthermore, we have managed to attract many more Member States.

We should be proud of these achievements and point them out more often. But we cannot take them for granted, and we should draw lessons from our mistakes. The Union is going through a difficult time at present, as are our Member States and their respective democracies. All the ideas which make up liberal democracy and secure social cohesion are being challenged in a new world full of all kinds of uncertainties.

New challenges

Europeans must address new challenges. Some challenges have external origins: terrorist attacks, climate change, uncontrolled migration, wars in the Middle East, an aggressive Russia violating freedom and peace, economic and social opportunities and challenges arising from globalisation. Others originate within the Union: a changing demography, political extremism, right-wing and left-wing populism, high unemployment and growing inequalities. The EU needs to concentrate on policies with a true European added value, which Member States alone cannot provide. The challenges go beyond the economy, although unemployment and economic uncertainty remain, in certain Member States, at an unacceptable level. These challenges concern security, global warming, the fair distribution of wealth, the functioning of democracy at all levels of power, the rule of law and a free and responsible society with independent media. Our open societies, open democracies and open economies within the EU are under threat from those longing for a nostalgic nationalism which would be harmful for our prosperity and which would undermine our values.

Europeans are concerned about their jobs, income and pensions, their identity, communal life

and personal security. This concern is exploited by extremists from both left and right. The EPP, however, seeks to transform this fear into hope. There is still significant potential for positive change within our societies; but time is running out. In the short term, Europeans want to see results in the areas that concern them most. But political leaders will also have to keep the long-term future in mind.

In this globalised world, democratic sovereignty has been weakened; it is only by nations' pooling together that true and effective sovereignty can be restored. Europe can only act forcefully and independently as a community.

Thinking ahead

In the past, too little attention has been given to building solid foundations and continued public support for the major projects that have transformed our continent: e.g. a common currency, the free movement of people, the unification of our continent. We must analyse the problems and adapt our priorities accordingly, where necessary, so they become more sustainable and more readily accepted. We must find solutions for the consequences of the demographic changes already underway and for the digital and energy-related revolutions taking place before our very eyes; for the global competition that will have an ever-growing impact; for the struggle for the survival of our planet and for the new dangers of war and instability, both in our neighbourhood and elsewhere. The European Union has an important role to play at regional and global level. We must not shirk our responsibilities in these difficult times. On the contrary, we must set the bar high and 'think big'!

Over the next ten years, we will need ambition, vision, courage and much stronger cooperation as well as cohesion at all levels of power. The European Union is not the only solution, but it is an essential one. A more fractured Europe will be a less secure Europe. Divided we fall; but by acting together, we must succeed. This collective effort must reassure our fellow citizens and protect them. The Union must not fail, since the cost of 'non-Europe', not only economically, would be enormous. We cannot limit ourselves to creating a 'space' for free movement; we must also create a 'place', a home, which protects us. The EPP must seek a new synthesis between openness and protection; it must display an identity that can be open to the world in national and European terms precisely because this identity is ingrained and self-assured. This tension between openness and protection is not limited to the EU level. It exists in each of our countries, in the USA and elsewhere. A balance must be found.

The nation-states are the masters of the Treaties. The nation stands for historical and cultural identity. The EU and the nations that form it are not in contradiction; rather, they strengthen and complement each other.

We also want to give to our citizens a better knowledge of the way in which our institutions work and benefit them, and we support efforts to enhance the consciousness of a common European citizenship.

For the next decade, we will have to work within the Union's existing institutional framework, which was fundamentally reformed and strengthened in 2009. We must reflect long and hard on the future changes required in order to make our Union more transparent, more effective and more democratic.

A new spirit

We must revitalise the spirit of moderation and cooperation, as well as solidarity paired with responsibility, which has always characterised the EPP's political actions. Our values are mainly rooted in the Christian Democratic idea of personalism, in a liberal democracy with checks-and-balances, the rule of law, non-discrimination, equality and dignity for all, the fundamental freedoms, separation of church and state and the social market economy. These principles must first be guaranteed within our own structures. Political and societal cohesion should be based on this set of ideas forming the foundation of our civilisation. We must rally the prime movers of civil society in order to strengthen social cohesion. We must promote the community and family resources which make society a better place and a more moderate environment for the exchange of ideas. We must encourage dialogue between religions and convictions; most importantly, different cultures can and must live together within the same overarching framework of values.

Political organisations and their members have a major responsibility in how they address the European idea and the issue of living together within a society. We have to do all we can to combat fear, aggressiveness, polarisation and extremism, and to give every opportunity to creativity, generosity, vitality and social justice. In brief, this means hope. We must contribute to this through concrete results and through our European and other messages, and through presenting a positive discourse on Europe. We will not hesitate to defend our common European identity. We must mobilise all available means to explain to our citizens, the younger generation in particular, the added value of being European, of belonging to the EU. The next decade will be decisive.

2. A prosperous, sustainable and fair Union

Our socio-economic system of entrepreneurship needs growth in order to create jobs, especially for young people, and to provide a financial basis for our social security systems. But this is not enough. The growth required must be more sustainable, fairer and more in tune with globalisation. Long-term stagnation looms and must be avoided.

The economy of the Eurozone recovered two years ago, and the other members of the Union have achieved better results. Again, this is not enough in itself. We need a strategy for the Union as a whole, one which will often be implemented at national level. The EU is more than the sum of its parts, the Member States.

Private and public investment must be encouraged. Throughout the Union, there is a deficit of investment and therefore of sustainable-growth potential. We have to enhance the capacity of national and local authorities to stimulate long-term investments. Re-creating an environment favourable for entrepreneurship — especially for SMEs in all economic sectors — a solid banking system, abundant venture capital and adequate internal demand are all necessary in order to encourage private investment. If market forces are lacking, the Union, among other actors, must provide assistance. Public investment may be needed to create opportunities for private investment and for job creation.

The new EU budget for the period post-2020 will have to be reoriented towards finance policies with true European added value. The post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposal can be qualified as a budgetary reflection on the Union's priorities. It is an opportunity to assess and reset political priorities. The Cohesion Policy must protect existing jobs and create new ones through investments in the real economy. The Juncker Plan for strategic investments (i.e. the European Fund for Strategic Investments, or EFSI) is a decisive step in this direction. It should become a permanent financial instrument for our Union, working in synergy with other EU funds. Its capacity for investment should be increased. The EFSI sets an excellent example of the way in which public investment can and should trigger private investment. Cohesion Policy post-2020 should remain an EU investment policy covering all Member States and EU regions. The share of Cohesion Policy in the total EU budget should be maintained in the future. The national budgetary policy must give priority to public investment in traditional infrastructure and in future-oriented sectors, such as Research and Development (R&D) as well as education and defence. Europe often lags behind the rest of the world. This trend must be reversed. We need to be more ambitious. The Horizon 2020 programme is an excellent example of how to move forward, and its budget should be secured and increased. Providing more on-site technical assistance is crucial in addressing the investment gap between Member States. The SME instrument is among the most successful in Horizon 2020. Therefore, there should be more targeted and efficient communication at national level in order to encourage the best use of this instrument.

The world stands on the verge of entering a Digital Age, following the Industrial Age that has shaped the past few centuries. Whether Europe will thrive and prosper also in this coming Digital Age will be decided by the policies we decide upon. We see how global digital value chains are starting to transform our industries, how entrepreneurship and innovation are reshaping our economic landscapes and how education, skills and talent are becoming keys to success. However, we have to be aware that not everybody will benefit from digitalisation; we need to be ready for this and to prepare our societies. We must reassure our citizens that nobody will be left behind. Europe rose to greatness in the Industrial Age, and we are determined that it must succeed also in the Digital Age. We have to pursue forward-looking policies to preserve an open, digital world. Other regimes are determined to secure state control and domination. But our societies have always been built mainly on freedom, democracy, the rule of law, openness and innovation.

By achieving our climate objectives, we will support economic growth and protect our food security. The new climate goals for 2030 can be achieved, which will make us a global leader in renewable energy and energy savings.

The European Union is facing unprecedented demographic changes (an ageing population, low birth rates, changing family structures and migration). In light of these challenges, it is important, both at EU and at national level, to review and adapt existing policies. We recognise that strong families are a precondition for positive demographic developments, and we advocate pro-family values and policies. We need a more creative and coordinated response from the EU and its Member States, and we call for a European strategy on demographic change and for more family- and child-friendly environments. This strategy should aim to integrate the economic, social and scientific challenges and increase the potential of the working-age population. It should also stimulate active and healthy ageing and create new opportunities for intergenerational solidarity. Moreover, it should take into account the major disparities between and within Member States, both in terms of life expectancy as well as in living and working conditions.

Our Union must continue to integrate with the world market. We must remain an open and competitive continent. The advantages for citizens, consumers and for the economy in general outweigh the negative effects. Those who, due to technological change or changing trade patterns, lose their livelihood should be given full support enabling them to learn new skills and re-enter the labour market. Free trade agreements must be compatible with our European social model and with environmental and consumer protection standards. Commercial dumping and monopolies must be tackled systematically and without hesitation; therefore, we must make sure that we have policies that can intervene forcefully and swiftly in case abuse of free trade occurs. Free trade agreements make us more competitive and efficient through better specialisation and should create more jobs and foster prosperity all over Europe.

The creation of the Single Market in Europe has been a source of prosperity for all. Yet the job is not finished. We must now move beyond the 'free movement' stage and work together in order to create an energy and a digital union to unleash hidden growth potential. We are in the process of creating a border-free Single Market for energy, decreasing our dependence on third countries, such as Russia, among others. In the digital field, we need to halt and reverse the existing fragmentation preventing the European economy from becoming more competitive. The universal guiding principle should be to create a true EU Single Market — also for services.

The results of prosperity must be shared equitably. Fair competition in the products and services markets must be maintained or restored. Combatting fraud and tax evasion at national, European and international levels has thankfully become a priority, but there must be no let-up in these efforts. Multinational companies must pay taxes whenever and wherever they make their profits. This holds true particularly in the case of value created online and via e-commerce. Here we must continue with our efforts to produce adequate regulations. Therefore, there is a need for more European fiscal harmonisation.

In order to promote fiscal justice, there can be no discrimination between income from work and income from assets. In some Member States, the fall in real salaries in a climate of economic growth poses a genuine problem for social justice and for societal support for our social market economy. It is also an obstacle to economic growth. It is one of the causes of political populism. Unemployment is, of course, the principal basis for inequality. Full employment remains a major objective. It is perfectly possible to achieve this while also avoiding a two-tier labour market: we do not want stable, full-time employment for some and very flexible, but poorly paid, jobs for others, often young people. The increasing flexibility of labour markets in certain sectors, however, is an inevitable response to consumer demands, and thus we must make our social security systems more flexible and adept at addressing new kinds of concerns: ultimately, they should always encourage people to seek employment. The EU should encourage and support the cross-border mobility of young people. Here, too, the European Union as a whole, and the Member States individually, must work together, each partner playing its own role but cooperating in a collective and converging effort.

In the case of insufficient growth, or growth which does not generate enough jobs, a special policy must be implemented based on training and additional support in order to get young people into jobs. Education and skills remain the best guarantees for employment. It is unacceptable to have labour shortages in future-oriented sectors, such as the digital market. Economic immigration will be inevitable in many countries, but this must be legal and organised. Labour mobility helps to address unemployment and the mismatch of skills and jobs. The free

movement of people is key for Europe's economic success.

At corporate and administrative level — in fact, at all levels — there must be a new focus on the human factor, so that employees are happier in their jobs and can improve their work/life balance. A good deal of progress can be made by giving everyone a more participatory and responsible role at different levels of an organisation. Today's social malaise is also evident in the workplace. It contributes to a rise in society's ills and also often prevents long-term improvements in productivity.

All of these elements must give new, more comprehensive, more inclusive, meaning to the concept of economic growth and to the European social model. We have to become, simultaneously, more competitive, more sustainable and more humane. We must also understand that our systems must continuously evolve, since technology challenges rigid and statist models now more than ever before.

This policy can only be implemented in an environment of monetary and budgetary stability. The Eurozone has already been strengthened by previous reforms, but the Economic and Monetary Union must be further strengthened and deepened so that, over time, it becomes a true banking, economic and budgetary union. Public finances must be structurally balanced over the next few years, as required by the Stability and Growth Pact, to regain margins to fight future shocks. Macro-economic balances are also necessary. We need both fiscal stability and competitiveness on the basis of structural reforms. An approach for the Eurozone as a whole is needed, in a spirit of responsibility and solidarity.

In order to safeguard a prosperous and sustainable future, we have to do the following:

- Stress the necessity for a step-wise approach to complete the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU);
- Further encourage private and public investment in order to close the investment gap;
- Continue negotiating with our economic partners balanced free trade deals which respect the norms and standards of the Union, in order to boost competitiveness and prosperity;
- Make every market part of the European Single Market and end fragmentation in order to boost productivity;
- Continue working on closing international tax loopholes to ensure that all companies, regardless of their size, pay their fair share of taxes;
- Improve social convergence within the European Union in order to raise living standards all over the Union;
- Invest in youth and skills training as part of our efforts to bring down unemployment levels throughout the Union;
- Encourage Member States to support those in poverty and, wherever possible, to support their reinsertion into the labour market;
- Make the workplace safe and healthy, such that people feel valued and respected, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity;
- Insist that the fiscal policies of Member States respect the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact, which has the necessary flexibility to support structural reforms and investment;
- Further strengthen the Economic and Monetary Union to ensure it is flexible and resilient and supports economic convergence within the Eurozone;

- Create a genuine Digital Single Market;
- Facilitate cooperation between more-developed and less-developed regions, and between urban and rural areas, and facilitate EU integration.

3. Our secure Union

Security has become our citizens' main concern. The European Union is facing a series of extraordinary threats from the east and from the south, both globally and from within. We will only be able to counter them if we fundamentally change our foreign, security and defence policy, becoming a strong and responsible actor in the international arena and adding hard power to the soft power the European Union is known for.

Fighting terrorism and Islamic extremism

Terrorism must be fought and eradicated. Much stronger European cooperation and integration is required in terms of exchange of information by intelligence services and exchanges of best practice and in terms of action to both prevent and counter radicalisation and terrorism. We need a harmonisation of anti-terrorism legislation. Better cooperation on the level of police and intelligence within the EU-framework is needed, but the problem needs to be tackled at the roots: upbringing and education are the places to start. The fight must be stepped up against the ideologies inspiring jihadist terrorism and creating within our countries parallel systems in which the basic values of the human person and of our liberal democracies do not apply.

Boosting cyber security

Cyber security is yet another area of strategic importance and strong concern. In order to achieve a true pan-European approach in ensuring cyber security, a common European cyber security strategy should be drafted and implemented. As is already the case in a number of EU Member States, this should also entail regular exchange at a high political level between EU bodies and Member States. In that spirit, it is essential to establish a common governance framework, based on harmonised cyber security standards, priorities, requirements and objectives across EU Member States. Effective monitoring and law enforcement is required to ensure that citizens' privacy is not threatened. Moreover, the continuous battle against cybercrime depends upon enhanced cooperation between public authorities and the private sector. For this reason, we need to invest in technological innovation in a global context in order to strengthen our collective efforts for tackling cyber security threats.

Controlling migration

The flow of refugees and economic migrants arriving in Europe has challenged our capacity to cope at European, national and local levels. Therefore, we need a common European approach to manage large-scale migration. Assistance and protection should primarily be granted by the EU in crisis countries themselves and in their neighbouring areas in order to mitigate irregular migration. It should be the European Union which, in accordance with international law, decides how many, and who, will qualify for protection within Europe through a common asylum policy.

At a time when the European Union is trying to defend its universal values, sharing the burden of asylum seekers and their costs will be a strong proof of solidarity in practice. This is why we need to promote legal access into Europe by means of resettlement programmes. Integration in our societies will be of key importance in maintaining social cohesion. Further, it is necessary to swiftly implement the EU-Turkey agreement and its provisions regarding the return and readmission of irregular migrants.

We need a common return policy for irregular immigrants. We must make agreements with migrants' countries of origin, encouraging them to cooperate in the identification and return process.

Africa's share of the global population is expected to grow from 16.4% in 2015 to 25% in 2050, and to 39% by 2100. The continent is therefore projected to be the largest contributor to future global population growth. These facts and figures must be taken into account when dealing with the complex subject of migration, including both its challenges and opportunities. We need to tackle more seriously the root causes of migration, help to bring peace to the EU's Southern Neighbourhood and foster economic development by investing in jobs, vocational training and entrepreneurship for African youth and women, especially in the agro-sector. We also need to invest in good governance and democracy-building in Africa and to develop plans with African countries to reduce unsustainable population growth and to prevent conflict. This implies a strong partnership with Africa and a serious review of our traditional development policy. Financing concrete investments, as well as attracting private capital where possible, needs to become a priority.

The Schengen system must be preserved, deepened and enlarged. The Schengen Area must be able to guard and protect its external borders. Exclusively European surveillance instruments are needed, together with a common asylum and migration policy aiming to strike a better balance between humanitarian obligations, on the one hand, and, on the other, the capacity of EU Member States to integrate migrants. At the same time, border countries of the Schengen Area should receive further support and assistance.

Common defence

The EU has to radically shape up on defence and security, in coordination with NATO and in close cooperation with our North American allies. The Atlantic alliance remains the cornerstone of the collective territorial defence of Europe, in parallel with the mutual solidarity commitments between EU Member States. We will work towards greater efforts by all Member States to meet the new defence and security challenges, honouring budgetary commitments already made and working in closer coordination and cooperation. We welcome NATO members' commitments to spend 2% of their GDP on defence, and we encourage EU Member States to increase their future defence spending for our common security.

The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) should be based on convincing diplomacy, a sound economic base and adequate armed forces. In time, we wish to see the emergence of a European Defence and Security Union worthy of the name, in order to guarantee our own protection, security and defence. We are convinced that the Union's security and defence will only be strong enough to defeat the current threats if we stand united. In the coming years, the EU and its Member States must, as a whole, increase defence spending and pool and share

defence capabilities. This will also help increase stability in our Mediterranean neighbourhood, currently a source of terrorism and uncontrolled migration. The Union cannot become a truly regional and global actor without a relevant military dimension. We believe that more commitment by Member States to the provisions of the CSDP is needed, in order to ensure smooth, tangible progress in achieving the CSDP and the European Defence Union. Far greater synergies in the research, development and procurement of military tools are needed. Therefore, we welcome the establishment of the EU Defence Fund. Battlegroups must finally become operational. We support the proposals for a civilian and military headquarters and for the instrument of Permanent Structural Cooperation for those countries wanting to go forward, as a coalition of the willing, with a view towards sustaining and improving their military capabilities with regard to leadership, personnel and material development, within the framework of the Treaties. The current work in the area of security and defence should lead to the eventual establishment of a European Armed Forces.

Responding to the Russian threat

Although it is not our desire, our tensions with Russia under President Putin may last for a long time. We reaffirm our determination to support Member States in the face of any aggression. Information warfare is an integral part of Russia's assault on Europe, an assault which targets liberal democracies, transatlantic cooperation and our European project itself. The EU must put in place an effective and detailed strategy to counteract Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns, to allocate the necessary resources and to provide a coordinated European response. While NATO will take care of strengthening defence and deterrence, the EU will have to focus on strengthening resilience against Russia's methods of hybrid warfare. This ranges from improving defences against Russia's use of weaponised information to strengthening social cohesion, to enhancing capacities for cyber defence. For all of this, close cooperation with NATO is essential. Above all, the EU must, along with NATO, continue its steadfast defence of fundamental principles, such as the inviolability of borders and the rights of nations to choose their own political and economic systems and their membership in international organisations. This firmness must be paired with the continued offer of dialogue and cooperation with Russia, according to the values of our common European culture.

Securing stability and peace in the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean is the southern border of the Union; to guarantee stability, peace and civil and economic development in this area is of primary concern for the Union.

We want to facilitate the peace process in Libya, encouraging the dialogue of all those willing to resist ISIS/Daesh and the forging of a coalition around the legitimate government. With this legitimate government, we must cooperate in order to reconstruct the Libyan state and to control the illegal human trafficking taking place in the Mediterranean, bringing would-be irregular immigrants back to their ports of departure, in accordance with international law. Libya should sign the Geneva Conventions and offer migrants full protection of their human rights. The Union should cooperate in achieving effective reconstruction and development policies.

Strengthening cooperation with countries in the whole area

In order to improve the security situation within and beyond our Union in the coming years, we have to do the following:

- Respond to the recent influx of refugees and migrants with coherent, strategic action;
- Tackle Schengen's current fragmentation and better protect our external borders;
- Counter political and religious extremism in Europe;
- Strengthen resilience to cyber war and prepare an EU response to hybrid warfare and cyber war;
- Further enhance and widen the operational capabilities of the newly created European Border and Coast Guard;
- End the grave situation in Syria and stabilise the surrounding countries;
- Strengthen EU cooperation on external security and defence;
- Support the restoration of Libyan statehood and strive towards respect for human rights in Libya.

4. Our Union as a regional and global leader

We have to improve and to strengthen the EU's image on the world stage. We must improve our capacity to act, deepen our partnership with the United States, pay particular attention to the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods and reach out to partners worldwide. The alliance, especially, between Europe and the United States, and including the Atlantic Community, needs to be strengthened and redefined on equal terms. We need a real European foreign policy in which Member States speak with one voice, delivering the same message. On strategic matters, Member States must enhance their cooperation and act together.

The European Union is a Union based on values and committed to peace all around the world. This is why the EU remains at the forefront of the struggle against global warming, through its own achieved results and through its role in global climate change conferences; this is why it is the largest donor worldwide in terms of development and humanitarian aid; why it is a shelter for those legally seeking international protection; why it remains opposed to commercial protectionism and in favour of free, fair and rules-based trade; why it defends human rights, democracy and freedom; and why it remains the key partner of the UN and its organisations.

The Union and its Member States are part of the Western world, but open to dialogue and cooperation with the rest. We are unyielding in the protection of our values, yet always ready to seek a negotiated solution. We must remain a strong voice for human rights and for open societies and open economies all over the world.

Stabilising our Southern Neighbourhood

The EU and its Member States must continue to develop capacities to enhance stability, increase prosperity and support the rule of law in the Southern Neighbourhood. This includes a renewed effort to reach out to our neighbours across the Mediterranean in the form of trade and cooperation; but it also involves readmission agreements and cooperation with transit countries. Furthermore, the Union must strengthen its Africa policy, in close cooperation with the African Union, in order to combat terrorism and instability, to promote socio-economic development, the rule of law and good governance and to strengthen civil society. This approach will also help to prevent a new migration crisis. Moreover, Europe must seek a long-term partnership with the rapidly developing countries of Africa.

Special attention should be paid to the increasing persecution of Christians and other religious minorities in the world, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. Protecting freedom of religion will require, moving forward, a more sophisticated and effective approach in the foreign and security policy of the EU and its Member States.

The future of enlargement and the Eastern Neighbourhood

The enlargement of the EU has made Europe as a whole more stable, more democratic and more prosperous. It remains one of the signature achievements of European integration. It has also given our Union much greater weight and importance in global affairs.

Recent history has given us a special responsibility for the Western Balkans region. Only European integration can provide a secure safeguard against the resurgence of forces of nationalist disintegration and conflict. The Union is able to enlarge if its capacity to integrate new members is taken into consideration and if candidate members fully and unequivocally satisfy the required conditions and the political criteria of Copenhagen, such as the rule of law and the respect for and protection of human rights and minorities. The support of the EU through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) is important.

Full membership into the Union, however, is not the only means of partnership. Other forms of relationship with the Union will have to be envisaged. In any case, we must begin now building a ring of partners around the Union for those countries which cannot or which do not want to become full members. The European Economic Area's potential should yet be fully utilised.

Exchange programmes for citizens are starting points for mutual learning and the exploration of European values. They enrich people as individuals, and they create bonds beyond borders. A renewed effort must be made to support democracy, strengthen the rule of law, enhance trade and economic cooperation and fight corruption in Eastern Partnership countries. Some of these countries have a European perspective.

In order to strengthen our role in the world, we have to do the following:

- Develop different forms of cooperation with neighbouring countries in order to build a ring of partners around the Union;
- Become a global player;
- Bolster diplomatic clout by means of military capabilities and a willingness to interve-

ne, complementary to NATO;

- Build stronger alliances, both regionally and globally;
- Invest in effective international institutions and push for an EU seat and an EU vote in global bodies.

5. An efficient and democratic Union closer to its citizens

The widespread demands for more democracy in the EU show that many citizens strongly desire to be more involved in EU decision-making.

Regarding EU competences, the directly elected European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, with its elected governments, and the European Commission — elected, approved and nominated by the European Parliament and the Member States, through the European Council — are fully and democratically legitimate. We also want to give to our citizens a better knowledge of the way in which our institutions work and benefit them, and we support efforts to enhance the consciousness of a common European citizenship.

This reality has to be strengthened further by greater transparency and more involvement at the level of regions and local communities, which are represented by the European Committee of the Regions. Modern means of communication should be used to a greater extent in broadening the space for interaction.

Enhanced subsidiarity and solidarity

The institutions must further evolve by means of adaption and a revised mechanism, by making them less bureaucratic and by respecting the balances that govern the functioning of the Union and the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity which function as guardian of the Treaties. National parliaments must now be strengthened, controlling implementation of the principle of subsidiarity and the national governments serving as members of the Council. EU decisions are binding. What has been decided at European level must be implemented by every Member State. At the same time, the Commission should pay more attention to the implementation of EU law in Member States before making new proposals. The Council and the European Parliament must support and control the European Commission in this endeavor, in a transparent way. For carrying out these tasks, we are convinced that the Union and the Member States must work in full mutual respect and in accordance with the principle of sincere and loyal cooperation. The Commission has a political role and must be the respected guardian of the Treaties. The European Council shall define the general political direction and priorities of the Union, and should concentrate its focus here.

The Union and the Eurozone can continue to develop within the framework of the current Treaties. We need closer cooperation between European and national levels. But more transparency is also needed so that citizens can understand which institution, and which level, is responsible.

National leaders have a key role to play in reconnecting the EU with the public. Members of the European Commission and of the European Parliament should participate more in national

parliamentary debates on EU issues. EU institutions should also systematically reach out to regional and municipal authorities, which on the whole enjoy greater trust from citizens.

Institutional reform

We consider the community method as the EU's basic working method, as this has proven to be democratic, transparent and efficient.

We should strengthen the European Parliament and the national parliaments at their respective levels. Moreover, cooperation between the European Parliament and national parliaments should be improved.

We want the European Parliament to be a guardian of democracy. For that, it has to reinforce its capacity to compel the Commission to take legislative initiatives and to hold the Commission accountable. The legal possibilities of European Parliamentary investigation committees have to become stronger where citizens' interests are at stake. The Spitzenkandidatenprozess enhances the results of the elections to the European Parliament and strengthens the will of the voters. We support the EU's single, existing institutional framework. Parliamentary cooperation for the Eurozone should be established within the European Parliament, preparing all decisions related to the Economic and Monetary Union.

Citizens have the right to understand the responsibilities and the competences of EU institutions. Therefore, it must become clearer, within the framework of the Treaties, that the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers constitute a two-chamber system when it comes to legislation. The working methods of the Council of Ministers should be made more transparent and comprehensible to citizens. The specialised Council configurations should become subcommittees of the Council, meeting in public sessions as an ordinary legislator. The Council's statutes should be adjusted accordingly. The EU should become a full parliamentary democracy.

Our goal is to reach agreement and deliver a better Union within the next decade.

Showing leadership and a clear vision

In recent years, we have seen a broad upsurge by extremist parties, on both the left and right, running through the Western world. Populists are using crises and uncertainties to feed suspicion and hostility. The populists' simple answers will not solve the complex questions and problems of today. Populism is at odds with progress, democracy and the social market economy. Populism, nationalism and anti-Europeanism are incompatible with a strong and efficient European Union capable of tackling the challenges of tomorrow. In a globalised world, we can be sovereign only if we pool our sovereignty. Each one of our states, left to itself alone, might rapidly become a puppet in the hands of some foreign political or economic power. We, not the so-called nationalists, are defending the sovereignties, the identity and the culture of our citizens. The challenge is to preserve our open societies while at the same time offering better protections against irregular migration, terrorism and increasing inequality within our societies, as well as against financial and economic instability, tax evasion and international fraud. We need to be the political force that provides answers to our citizens' concerns; only in this way we can combat fear and insecurity. We have to shape a new balance between freedom, security

and fairness. As a European political party, we will lead by example for our citizens, including them in the European project and communicating more, and more clearly, with them. Only by means of a process that includes constant exchange, and by obtaining results in our policies, will we be able to explain our vision, goals and actions — and ultimately win broader support.

In order to bring our Union closer to the citizens, we have to do the following:

- Provide better coordination and dialogue between European and national democratic institutions;
- Increase political competition and political debates at EU level;
- Strengthen European political parties and political groups;
- Further promote the Spitzenkandidatenprozess in public discourse;
- Make European elections less national and more European;
- Respond to citizens' concerns and lack of trust in the political establishment;
- Explain and promote the benefits of the European project for citizens;
- Foster a European identity and sense of belonging;

Providing a future for young people

We must mobilise all available means to explain to our citizens, the younger generation in particular, the added value of being European, of belonging to the EU. Young people are the future of our Union. We want young people to look at the future with hope and confidence. We believe in the ability of young Europeans to create, to grow and to prosper. The best-educated, best-trained generation in the world deserves more and can achieve more. With hard work, social commitment and political responsibility, the youth of Europe can strengthen our Union. We are the political force that invites young people to participate in the decision-making process; therefore, we support the proposals of young Europeans from all over Europe. This will entail having a common, internal education system by achieving the following: full recognition of qualifications across Europe; a European framework for education standards; greater cooperation in research and increased mobility of students and lecturers beyond existing mobility programmes; and, finally, a universal graduate diploma allowing students full freedom of movement across the EU. We also promote the launch of an EU Solidarity Corps, which should provide a specific European solidarity framework offering young people high-quality experience in both voluntary and professional fields.

Vocational training should contribute to decreasing the gap between formation and education with regards to the skills and competences demanded by the market and by society: through access to mobility, through recognition of qualifications and through higher standards. For all young people, the development of creativity and critical thinking will be crucial. Youth unemployment should be considered as a distinct phenomenon, bearing in mind the importance which the development of digital skills is already acquiring and will continue to acquire in the near future.

Our European Union is a union of its citizens, its regions and its nations. It is built on, and it cherishes, the heritage of all of our various nations, cultures, beliefs and convictions. Our Europe is

enriched by our nations, and our nations thrive in the community of other European nations. It is a Europe based on subsidiarity and solidarity.

Only together can we meet global challenges and win back the sovereignty of our nations and citizens.

European values and interests need to be defended by all of us together. Unity in diversity — this is our common vision.

**If you have any question
you would like to ask
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