

Our choices for Europe

Some ideas for a political programme

At this decisive point in European history, there is a critical need for a new, strongly pro-European force that can bring together all those who truly believe in European integration and are committed to a programme for a stronger Europe and a more positive approach to European integration.

We need to identify clear political priorities inspired by the values of our Manifesto – peace, freedom, democracy, solidarity and education – and make strong, effective choices to move towards an ever-closer political Union.

The first steps

Our choices should not come out of the blue. Europe has taken big steps forward in many areas in the last few years. Nonetheless, further development and strengthening are needed in many of these policy areas and initiatives so they can provide a basis for action now.

Examples of such policy areas and initiatives include:

- developing the European Neighbourhood Policy, which has already provided significant results in terms of fostering dialogue with Russia and across the Euro-Mediterranean region;
- establishing a truly Europe-wide education and research area;
- strengthening measures involving young people and voluntary action to give substance to the concept of European citizenship;
- taking further action in fields where major reforms have been undertaken, such as the Common Agricultural Policy, but where further action is still required, and in other fields, such as economic governance, where reflection and practical action are even more urgent;
- meeting popular demand for consumer protection and for a single area of freedom, security and justice;
- giving new impetus in the fields of energy, transport, the environment and sustainable development in general.

It is vital to take these initiatives and policies further and avoid losing momentum in coming months. At the same time, these initiatives can represent a basis for joint action, and our priority should be to start working on these practical projects from the first day the newly elected European Parliament starts working.

The wider choices we have to make

Let us be clear: not all the challenges facing Europe can or should be met from Brussels. Whether we are talking about foreign policy, security and justice, the economy, health, the environment, employment policy, immigration, scientific research or education, the issues concern every level of government – EU, national, regional and local. What is crucial is to ensure the whole is coherent, i.e. to make sure there is coherence between short-term and longer-term policies and between policy-making and policy implementation at the various levels of government. Coherence is vital for achieving results and ensuring that the capacity exists to govern the complex affairs of the European Union.

Europe in the world

EU policies in support of peace and, more generally, the EU's approach to world affairs must reflect its history and draw inspiration from a new philosophy of international relations. The first contribution the EU can make is its own experience, which constitutes a unique and extraordinary achievement in terms of regional integration. The Union we have built is the fruit of long, patient dialogue and of a constant and at times an uphill struggle to find a wider common interest and a higher, stable equilibrium with which each party can identify. At its base is a method for organising relations between States and peoples that has brought staggering results over the last fifty years – making war between European States unthinkable and seeing through enlargement from the original six to the current 25 members (and more tomorrow) and the adoption of a single currency. The European Union is the world's most extraordinary example of democratic governance of the globalisation process, a model that is inspiring other continents – such as Latin America and Africa – in their search for new forms of cooperation to overcome old divisions.

We Europeans feel called on to contribute to peace, stability and security throughout the world. The United Nations and, on a smaller geographical scale, the Atlantic Alliance unquestionably underpin EU foreign policy, which cannot be regarded as separate from – much less opposed to – that of the United States. If the Atlantic Alliance in particular is to stand the test of time, it needs to be supported by two equally strong pillars – an American pillar and a European pillar. From the EU viewpoint, this means accepting increasing responsibilities, military and otherwise – including their budgetary implications – that flow from its ambition to play a leading role on the international stage. To sum up, we have to work to develop a fully fledged European security and defence policy, which implies the capacity to take responsibility and act to ensure our own security where our US partners are not directly concerned. It also calls for joint efforts to combat transnational crime, introduce common controls of our external borders and establish a common area of freedom and justice.

Peace, freedom and security are not goals that can be achieved once and for all throughout the world. They may even need to be defended by force of arms. But the EU's international action cannot bypass the political and legal reference framework of the United Nations. However clear the need to reform the way the UN operates and takes decisions, that organisation offers the strongest and most legitimate approach to responding to the need for organised international relations. The EU needs to speak with a **single voice**, and the first step towards achieving this is for it to have a single representative in all international organisations and financial institutions, starting with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and in due time including the United Nations. This is important to ensure *both* the European Union *and* these international organisations are more effective. Alongside supporting a single representation within the United Nations, Europe should work for the substantive reforms the organisation needs, in particular to make it more adapted to today's world and to take due consideration of both the many facets of globalisation and the rise of regional integration and regionalism worldwide.

In the international arena, Europe needs clear lines of authority and procedures for taking immediate and positive action once there is a decision. Giving the Union a single voice on the international scene is also a question of European institutional architecture. Majority voting should be the general rule for adopting decisions and taking action at EU level. This is important if the Union is to act effectively both *within* and *beyond* its boundaries, in all policy areas.

We are convinced that wars are not won by weapons alone. This is now borne out by the facts too. This is even truer of the fight against terrorist organisations. It is a dangerous illusion to think they can be defeated without tackling their root causes, such as injustice, poverty, the negation of rights and repression. Force alone is not enough to defeat terrorism. Both force and brainpower must be used. Alongside the military option and repression, political avenues need to be explored with equal determination. And for both options the multilateral approach is unavoidable. This approach does not hold only for the fight against terrorism. Consistent, coherent multilateral action should guide all EU initiatives in the international arena. In particular, the Union needs to give fresh impetus to its efforts to step up dialogue and cooperation with non-member countries.

The Union cannot achieve its full development potential and cannot be sure of its own security until the Mediterranean has been transformed into an area of peace, democracy and stability. Full, effective control of immigration can only be achieved through close relations with the countries on the Mediterranean's southern shores. The Mediterranean offers a great opportunity for trade and investment and is also a region of incredible cultural diversity. Five centuries after the discovery of the Americas, the Mediterranean is regaining its central strategic position in world politics as Asia emerges and dialogue with the Arab world takes on increasing importance. The region's development relies on ever-closer relationships, based on intergovernmental cooperation and partnerships between social and economic actors. In this respect, the participation of civil society in all countries around the Mediterranean's shores is essential for the area's growth and development, and the Union should work to facilitate this.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to overshadow the future of the region and thwart any real hopes of peace. The only path to follow is dialogue. The ultimate goal remains the existence of the State of Israel and a Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security as two free, sovereign States in a democratic, peaceful and prosperous Middle East. To achieve this goal, the Union must be willing to commit financial and human resources.

The Union must also strive to breathe new life into its relations with its present and future neighbours, the ring of friendly countries that stretch along its borders from Russia and Ukraine to Morocco. If it fails to defend its cultural, political and institutional identity, Europe as such will cease to exist. For us, a strong identity means one that is robust and open. With this "ring of friends", we must therefore aim to share everything except our political institutions.

In its relationship with the developing countries, the Union should redouble its efforts and make sustainable development one of its top priorities worldwide. This calls for a more generous and more closely targeted aid policy, the establishment of a closer partnership with governmental and non-governmental actors and the direct involvement of civil society in Europe and abroad. Concomitantly, through the multilateral trading system, Europe should promote better market access for the poorest countries and support the fight against poverty and economic marginalisation in the international arena. Europe as a unified entity is a relatively new actor on the international scene, and unlike its Member States taken individually, it is unburdened by any colonial past and can take advantage of its capacity to foster partnership, dialogue and cooperation for the benefit of the developing countries.

Participation and pluralism

Our democracies are going through a difficult time. One factor that raises doubt about their robustness is the way traditional forms of participation in democracy are faltering.

In our view, the general interest should inspire, and be the mission of, all political parties and politics in general. The aim of political parties should be to shape solutions to the problems of society at large, in particular taking account of those who cannot count on other forms of representation or ways of putting their views forward. We need to encourage the development of a new *humanism* in politics. We need more politicians with a vocation for politics and fewer who indulge in political opportunism and adopt a superficial approach to Europe.

A second factor that is crucial to the health of our democracies is the way the media pervade every aspect of social – and hence political – life. We need to develop forms of participation and dialogue that involve more people in political debate in a more systematic way. In this respect, the pluralism of information must be defended at all costs, for the very existence of democracy in Europe depends on this. And we must not lose sight of our aim of giving political representation to collective interests and responding to the expectations and demands of society as a whole.

Europe of the regions

Socially and politically, Europe is much more than the 455 million plus citizens and the 25 or 30 States that make it up. Millions of Europeans also feel they belong to and identify with collective entities of other types, based on culture, language, geography or history, that coexist within the current Member States under varying political formulae. The regions, and in particular regions with legislative powers and democratically elected parliaments and governments, are the clearest illustration of this. We support a Union that takes this political reality into consideration, both at institutional level and in the way its policies are devised.

Growth based on innovation

EU experience suggests that we have been most successful in reducing inequalities during the years of highest growth, e.g. the period from 1960 to 1980, while years of slow growth, e.g. between 1980 and 2000, saw much less – or no – success in this. So while growth will not in itself reduce inequality, it must remain the EU's top economic priority.

What is essential is to have structures, institutions, laws and regulations that foster competition and encourage new operators to come onto the market, that promote greater labour mobility within and between firms, more efficient financial markets that are willing to risk investing in innovation, and the full participation of women in the labour market. In this respect, immigration and labour-market policies need to be ever more closely coordinated.

We categorically reject any demands for a return to protectionism. This approach is misguided, impracticable and downright harmful. On the contrary, opening up international trade is the right approach to economic governance for the future. Not only does trade contribute to peace in the world, but through trade and international economic forums and organisations, the Union can promote its values across the world, applying peer pressure to our partners to encourage the introduction, for instance, of better working conditions for workers in developing countries and respect for internationally agreed environmental standards.

Europe's only hope is to keep at the forefront of innovation. The Union must harness resources to create great universities, laboratories and centres of excellence capable of attracting the best minds from all over the world and producing cutting-edge scientific research and innovation. The Union

can do a great deal to link research to growth and research is our major hope for a prosperous Europe tomorrow.

Education

Education is crucial to our citizens' effective participation in European politics. Europe's universities should not lose sight of their centuries-old vocation for training students in accordance with our humanist tradition. Education should contribute first to developing the capacities of Europe's citizens and then to giving them a better chance on the job market. This is perfectly consistent with the Union's aim of fostering the development of a European society of knowledge.

This places an extraordinary burden on education, at pre-school level – which is crucial for ensuring an aptitude to learn is spread equally – as well as at university and post-graduate level and in the field of research. The United States is not our only competitor. Just around the corner are India and China with their huge populations, their unbeatable production costs and above all their extraordinary ability to assimilate the latest and most-advanced technologies.

Secondary education and vocational training, which once formed the basis for entry into the working world in the Europe of mass industrialisation, no longer suffice in today's economy, which is geared to services and new technologies. Because of the way our universities are organised and designed, they are also proving largely incapable of providing job opportunities in line with the investment made by students and their families and of maintaining the level of excellence Europe needs if it is to stay at the forefront of innovation and compete on an equal footing with the most highly advanced countries, headed by the US.

Attention should also be paid to the promotion of special education (education for children with special needs) within the EU.

The European social model: balancing market and public goods

International trade, innovation, education and research are not enough to put Europe firmly back on the path to growth. The starting point must be to create the basic conditions for growth. We must maintain sound public finances and, where necessary, put our public finances in order to ensure they stay healthy in the future.

We must continue to keep inflation under control, because generalised, uncontrolled price rises destroy growth and lead to inequality.

We must safeguard competition in the knowledge that if the market is to be genuinely free, it cannot be left to its own devices. At the same time, services of general interest and common public goods cannot be left solely to the forces that shape the free market. The public authorities should continue to regulate and/or deliver essential public services at the various levels of government.

It is equally important to exploit the full potential of the Single Market and overcome the remaining obstacles in sectors such as air and rail transport, energy and – crucially – the capital market. The establishment of a common European area without barriers to communication and mobility for EU citizens must remain a priority in the further development of the internal market. At the same time, we need to complete the network of links, particularly road and rail links, between the current EU

Member States and to step up our efforts to establish good communications between eastern and western Europe.

The European social model is a source of great pride to us and a crucial facet of our view of life and of the way people relate to each other and with the public authorities. But it needs to be brought up to date, because life expectancy has increased so significantly and because the changes in today's society, which is now so different from the early post-war years, have been accompanied by changes in the needs, expectations and demands of the public, young and old, workers and consumers. If we want to maintain and preserve this European social model, we need to reform it without betraying the values and traditions on which it is founded.

Family policies are increasingly ill-suited to the actual situation, with ever-growing ranks of old people living alone without the support of relatives and increasing numbers of working women forced to accept – or choosing – to have only one child or none at all.

Equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, and special attention should be paid to ensuring that the rights of people with disabilities are safeguarded across the Union.

In every country, social security – the sole focus of most welfare-policy debates – needs to take account of the increase in life expectancy, which is undermining the longer-term sustainability of traditional systems of financing.

One of our first objectives is to meet the goals of the Lisbon strategy. Finding a job and organising one's career will be facilitated by the elimination of obstacles to entering the job market, depending on the differing needs of young people, women and older workers. Self-employed and temporary staff need to be assisted so their working conditions are not intolerable and insecure.

By “differing needs” we are referring in particular to those of the most vulnerable members of society. The Union must provide a safety net for these people if it wants to live up to the standards of civilised society. Such a safety net should be based on social inclusion and should provide for a guaranteed minimum wage. This is a principle that must be accepted and taken on board throughout the Union.

The environment and consumer protection

Clean air and water and safe food and agricultural products provide guarantees of better health and lower healthcare spending. Properly tended land, rivers and forests provide the most effective protection from the disasters that environmental neglect brings summer after summer, year after year. When the prospects for innovation are considered, the environment can clearly offer excellent scope for the development of new technologies and consequently a competitive advantage for EU industry.

Consumers can play a crucial role here. Through their choices they can exert a decisive influence on the way producers behave, prompting firms to regard as profitable, even in the short term, business strategies that are clearly inspired by a concern for the environment and the rights of producers in poorer countries.

At the same time, consumers need protection. As shareholders, for instance, they need to be protected against fraud and bad financial management in private companies.

Labour-market policies and strategies to reduce unemployment should be pursued with an eye to the cultural contexts in which they are to be applied. Our societies are increasingly multiethnic. Considerations linked to cultural, social and ethnic diversity within our societies should form part of our responses to employment issues.

Immigration

In this area, a coordinated European immigration policy is crucial. Illegal immigration must be combated through rigorous controls at the Union's external borders, managed by the Member States as a collective responsibility. There is a need for an asylum policy based on criteria applying across the Union. This calls for dialogue and for investment and readmission agreements with the countries from which large numbers of immigrants come. Lastly, there is a need for a strategy for integrating legal immigrants (with the provision of significant investment in families' living conditions and in education for adults) and, most importantly, children as a necessary first stage.

Citizenship and the younger generation

Full integration and citizenship for immigrants from outside the Union, as well as for EU citizens resident in an EU country other than their own, are issues to be discussed. It is time to adopt a more generous policy on citizenship for these Europeans, both the "new" and the others, who have chosen to settle in a new country, who develop a feeling of belonging and who display a keener "European spirit" than those originating there. Regardless of their Member State of residence, EU citizens should have the right to vote in local and parliamentary elections.

United by a Single Market and a single currency, Europeans want to be able to live in freedom and safety within a genuine single area of justice where the laws are clear and the same for all. Europeans are demanding security and protection from the dangers that can threaten in everyday life in our cities, in daytime and at night, where those most exposed are the weakest and the elderly.

Governing means that first, the national and local authorities and second, the EU institutions should take citizens' concerns and fears on board. The role that young people can play is also very important. Compulsory military service within the Union is being replaced by an integrated policy in the field of voluntary service. Linking the latter to protecting the environment and society's more vulnerable members in the volunteers' countries of origin as well as in other Member States would contribute to European social integration and would help to foster a common European identity among young people.