

The Hague Declaration 2018 – Sharing Europe



The 70th anniversary of the Congress of The Hague, which marked the first steps of European integration and led to the creation of the European Movement, comes at a time when Europe is at a crossroads. Just like in 1948 we need to mobilise all sides of society, reflect upon the future direction Europe needs to take to meet the challenges of our time. Today Europe faces many challenges. The effects of globalisation, the acceleration of technological developments and increased inequalities, the rise of populist and nationalist voices, and the imminent departure of a Member State are having an effect on the economic and political landscape in Europe. As we search for new bold and ambitious ideas, citizens should take centre stage in any scenario for Europe's future. European leaders need to embark on decisive actions that go beyond empty words and narrow national interests, to create a more democratic, sustainable, inclusive, prosperous, cultural and social Europe.

Democracy and values

Europe's future cannot be decided top-down. Europe's future belongs to all its citizens. At a moment when Europeans turn to the EU, the full participation of all citizens and **transparency** of decision-making needs to improve. European **democracy** must reinvent itself – as it did in 1948 – and can benefit from constitutional and technological innovations, new spaces for civil society and new tools fostering **participation**, as well as a renewal of the electoral process at European level. Europe needs to invest in **education** based on critical thinking, if we are to combat the rise of fake news. Education both in formal and non-formal settings must prepare people, from the youngest age, to become active citizens. We need to safeguard our **open societies** by fighting corruption and clientelism, by defending the **rule of law** and by strengthening the judiciary and **free press** if we are to resist the advance of "illiberalism". Faced with fake news, dominance of US-based platforms and populism, the EU should strengthen the fourth pillar of democracy, and help the media sector to innovate and grow.

A new economy

European citizens seek economic, social, cultural and environmental **well-being**. 10 years after the financial crisis engulfed Europe, we need to transform our economic model into one that ensures **prosperity** for all within the carrying capacities of the planet. This will involve harnessing the **opportunities** of technology, not least to reduce our material footprint and our dependency on imported resources, as well as investing in up-skilling Europeans throughout their lives. The European economy can only benefit by strengthening the euro, so we need to complete **the economic and monetary union** which underpins it. Furthermore, the consolidation and extension of the **single market** in combination with strong **social and environmental** policies is the springboard for prosperity for all, competitiveness and economic development in Europe.

A social model that protects and upskills

But a more prosperous and more deeply integrated Europe is only of use if it improves the life of each citizen. With poverty and social exclusion unacceptably high, Europe must address widening inequalities and **invest** in education,

culture, R&D and skills for the jobs of the future. At the same time, we must strengthen the EU's **social dimension**, with special attention paid to the full **participation** of women, young people to ensure that no one is discriminated against, both in the economy and in society as a whole.

Culture

Culture is a key aspect of our European **heritage** and **identity**, that acts as a powerful tool in unifying people regardless of their background. Europe is unique in terms of its **cultural diversity**, which is an asset that we need to embrace and build on, not only to strengthen our societal ties but also to support the European project. As citizens look at their place in Europe, culture is essential in reminding them why the European project started in the first place and why we need to face and build our future together.

Europe as a global actor

Europe also needs to embrace its role as a global actor. In tackling **climate change**, we must put in place an effective **environmental policy**, support a transition towards sustainable renewable energy, decarbonisation and the circular economy, reverse biodiversity loss, combat air and water pollution, eliminate toxic chemicals and promote sustainable agriculture. Putting a strong emphasis on the delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the **Sustainable Development Goals** must be at the core of policy-making at all levels of governance, from local and regional to national and European. Europe must lead the change towards sustainable societies in all dimensions: social, environmental and economic.

With regards to **security**, a common European defence policy should above all be used to ensure **peace** on the European continent and in its neighbourhood. Furthermore, in the challenging strategic environment the EU faces, closer security and **defence cooperation** can consolidate its global position and ensure its strategic interests. We must address the sense of insecurity felt by many by providing a **joint response** to the geopolitical challenges, not least with regards to Russia and the spread of extremism and terrorism, which have contributed to a sense of insecurity felt by many.

When it comes to our **trade policy**, Europe's core democratic values and commitment to high standards of social, environmental, health, worker and consumer protection should be reflected in and promoted through any trade agreements; such agreements should under no circumstances undermine such values and standards.

Over recent years, political debates have also been defined by **mass population movements**, which in turn can affect the economic and social make up of Europe. With geopolitical instability and climate change forcing people to flee their homes, Europe needs to address **migration** in a more holistic way. It must **protect** those in need, both in Europe and in refugee camps abroad, address the root causes of population movement across the globe by **investing** in local economies and sustainable development, in clean industries, in education for all as well as in the preservation and enhancement of local culture and cultural heritage. Europe should also support **social inclusion** policies and seize the opportunity of the **diversity** brought by these new Europeans. This should happen in close cooperation with local and regional authorities as well as civil society organisations and with appropriate funding.

While Europe is designing its own way forward, it should not neglect to involve and implicate the candidate countries and the countries in the **Eastern partnership** with whom we will share a common future. Europe's transformative power is best demonstrated in the immediate neighbourhood. **Enlargement** to the Western Balkans and expanding of the community of values through a close partnership with our neighbourhood countries represents an investment in Europe's stability and prosperity.

As in 1948, once again Europe needs to come together to defend and embrace that which we share, our diverse culture, our values and our belief in European democracy. We must craft a course for the future, with new narratives and imagination, with new practices and innovative forms of governance, in new forms of connecting and collaborating, and in experimenting with new institutions. This is the strength of the European project, let's build on it. Let's share Europe.

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