

TOGETHER FOR A STRONG EUROPE

The SPD 2024 European
Election Manifesto

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Together for a strong Europe

I. Introduction

Wiray, we can look back at the impressive success story of a Europe once torn apart by war. Enemies have become allies and partners. We live in a unique community of almost 450 million citizens who are united in their diversity. The European Union forms the foundation of security, peace and prosperity for the people of our continent.

In a world unhinged by a brutal Russian war of aggression on the European continent, this union is more important than ever. Whoever jeopardises Europe, whoever attacks or questions Europe's unity and strength – whether from within or from the outside – attacks the foundations of our coexistence. A strong Europe that provides its people with security is therefore at the centre of our policies and actions.

It is in our deepest national interest to further strengthen the European Union and to shape it in accordance with our convictions. As the party that holds the German chancellorship, the SPD has a great deal of influence and therefore a special responsibility for the future of Europe. We accept this responsibility at all levels and assume it carefully and decisively.

What makes Europe strong

The European Union has proven itself in the crises of recent years. Social Democratic crisis management has brought Europe together where conservatives had previously sown division. During the coronavirus pandemic, we showed how solidarity makes us strong through cross-border cooperation and the largest reconstruction fund in European history. In response to the Russian war of aggression, we acted decisively together with our European partners and supported Ukraine politically, economically and militarily. We aim to build on the foundation of this resolute, common European policy.

Europe is strong when peace reigns and people can coexist in security. It is our responsibility to ensure that no child born in the European Union today will ever experience war. To this end, we will continue to use all diplomatic means to promote reconciliation and democracy. At the same time, we are strengthening our defence and military cooperation and are working resolutely on the political enlargement of Europe. After all, co-operation and collaboration are the basis for peace within the European Union.

Europe is strong when its democracy is respected and protected. The European Union must be robust and possess effective instruments against its enemies from within and from without. This is why we endeavour to strengthen the rule of law and strengthen our democracy.

Europe is strong if the fight against climate change is successful and becomes an engine for employment. To achieve this, Europe must invest massively in future technologies and infrastructure and support industry on the path to climate neutrality. This will secure millions of jobs and create many new ones. A strong European single market is the backbone of our prosperity and provides enormous benefits for working people, especially in Germany – if it is organised fairly.

Europe is strong when it contributes to people being able to lead a good, self-determined life. Therefore, we place our focus on social justice, especially in the process of transformation, and on the fair distribution of costs and opportunities in the energy and mobility transition. Europe will only be successful if people with low incomes are able to live a good life and benefit from climate protection. We will, furthermore, utilise the potential of digitalisation for progress and prosperity and ensure that technology and development in Europe continue to align with people's needs.

Europe is strong when good working conditions prevail and workers' rights are protected. No one in Europe should be exploited for their labour. Wage and social dumping must be prevented more effectively.

Europe is strong when it speaks with a single voice in the world. If we act together, we can contribute to shaping the world of tomorrow. If not, others will write the rules of global politics. The EU must act and be perceived as a sovereign geopolitical player.

Europe is strong when the brightest minds and hardest-working talents see their home and future here.

This requires an ambitious innovation agenda and modern immigration law. This requires solutions to maintain both order and humanity at our external borders.

This is the strong Europe we are working for.

Our guiding principles

Successful politics require a compass to guide progress. We are therefore basing our manifesto for a strong Europe on three key principles that inform the SPD's actions:

- We will create a **Europe ready for the future**. If we make the best possible use of our resources, the world's largest single market, and the potential of the diversity of the people in Europe, we can transform the changes we need to make into social progress and ensure that everyone benefits. We will strive to create good work for all. We will fight climate change and at the same time strengthen Germany and Europe as a location for business. Together in Europe, we can ensure that we remain ahead of the global competition and that no one needs to be afraid of the future.
- Ensuring a **strong Europe in the world** is our response to the international challenges, security policy changes and the pressure that democracies are facing from populists and autocrats. If we speak with one voice, we will be strong enough to make our values and interests heard in the world. Together, we can make Europe the partner of choice, strengthen the rules-based order and campaign internationally for peace and against inequality.
- We want a **Europe of respect**. We are proud that Europe offers a wide range of opportunities for us to live our lives the way we want to. This includes good working conditions, a fair distribution of wealth and a safe and good life, no matter where you come from, what job you do or who you love. We will defend this principle against those who aim to restrict and abolish it. Respect also means that fair rules apply to all. Europe must take effective action against threats to the rule of law and the separation of powers, because the programme of the populists and Europhobes is ultimately a programme of social and cultural impoverishment for its citizens.

What's at stake in the 2024 European election

The European Union is currently facing a number of challenges that will determine how we will live in Europe and in Germany in years to come. The 2024 European election is therefore a directional election in which the people of Europe will determine the way forward. We want a strong Europe that can safeguard our peace, our freedom and our prosperity – even in an increasingly uncertain world. Right-wing populism, which has re-established itself across Europe and propagates national egoisms that were thought to have been overcome, jeopardise all our achievements in Europe.

Germany needs a strong Europe and Europe needs a strong Germany. Together, we can provide answers to current and future crises and challenges that are in step with the times and are based on our shared values. This is

how we can ensure that we as Europeans have a bright future together. Together, we can avoid the dangerous path of right-wing populists and their misanthropic policies. To do so, we Social Democrats need your vote.

II. A Europe ready for the future

Our vision for the future of Europe is climate-neutral and economically strong. For us, the two are closely linked. Climate protection must succeed because it is the basis for ensuring that future generations have a good foundation for life. Europe's future is inconceivable without climate protection.

Europe is well positioned to create future prosperity through effective climate protection. To achieve this, Europe must remain an industrial centre. We want an active industrial policy that invests massively in climate-neutral future technologies, a secure energy supply, infrastructure and innovation. The expansion of renewable energies has absolute priority. Climate protection can thus become an engine for jobs and lay the foundation for the next decade of economic growth and prosperity. European programmes and initiatives are of crucial importance for us in Germany as national and European climate and economic policy must go hand in hand.

The European single market will continue to be the backbone of economic development and must be further deepened, as millions of jobs in Germany are closely tied to a strong internal market. But the market must be fair and investment must be channelled into sustainable production processes. The abuse of power by large companies at the expense of consumers, employees and the self-employed must be prevented. However, we also support business and hold economic players to account to create the sustainable and fair prosperity of tomorrow. Here, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals play a central role. The Europe of the future is also a Europe of innovation and creativity, in which new ideas unfold. This requires clear rules that are respected and enforced and an innovation landscape that makes it easier to try out new methods and products.

We are committed to finding answers to the challenges of our time and that ensure a life in freedom, peace and a just society – today and tomorrow.

1. The future of Europe as a centre of business and industry

With its essential freedoms of movement of goods, people, services and capital, the European single market is one of the largest economic areas in the world. The common market is the centrepiece of our European economic strength and is the engine of European prosperity. Thirty years after the birth of the single market, we are going through a comprehensive transformation of our economy and the way we live and work. This change is occurring amidst intense global competition over resources, technologies and standards. We want Germany and Europe to remain an attractive location for business and industry, that secures the jobs and prosperity of tomorrow. In Europe we want to show that industry, climate protection and social progress go hand in hand. This is why we need new economic and industrial initiatives in Europe. We need future technologies that are "Made in Europe".

Advancing European industrial strategy

We want to further develop European industrial strategy (the Green Deal Industrial Plan) as part of a comprehensive location and resilience strategy that is aligned with the future and the new conditions of global competition. We will ensure that the EU Commission and the Member States involve broad sections of the economy, civil society and, in particular, trade unions in the further development of European economic and industri-

al policy. We want to continue to promote strong social partnerships, fair working conditions and high social standards in a socially and ecologically sustainable Europe. Above all, companies that benefit from state subsidies and transformation programmes must be obliged to create good jobs in the long term in Europe – under collective labour agreements. We favour state subsidies in key industries and future technologies that support value creation in Europe and make us strategically more independent.

Investing in the industries of the future

We want to support industry in its transition to climate-neutral and circular processes, focussing on both basic materials industries and manufacturing sectors such as the flagship automotive industry. We aim to support these industries in their innovation efforts, which will impact the rest of the economy. Particularly in areas such as green hydrogen, battery technology, electro-mobility, wind and solar power technologies, and biotechnology, we see great strategic potential for the European market. We want to ensure the further expansion of production capacities in such key areas of the digital and ecological transformation.

Improve regulation and speed up planning processes

For a successful, active economic and industrial policy, we must have the ability to make strategic decisions at the European level and at the same time reduce bureaucracy where possible, in order to speed up planning processes and create space for entrepreneurship and creativity. A responsible reduction of bureaucratic barriers in the internal market is essential for large companies as well as for SMEs, start-ups, the self-employed and freelancers. At present, European industrial policy is regulated primarily through ad hoc control of national aid and via a large number of platforms and committees for different European programmes. There is a lack of data, analytical resources and pooled competences at the EU level. We want to change this and improve the quality of EU regulation. We will continue to work towards simplifying obstacles to investment such as lengthy authorisation procedures and extensive state aid audits. To achieve this, various regulations must be updated. In some cases, regulations pose an obstacle to one other. Here, we aim to simplify the situation without lowering protection standards. In addition, we intend to support those regions that are leading the way by creating special zones in which shortened and streamlined planning and authorisation procedures support networked, climate-neutral industrial hubs that provide good jobs.

To this end, we want to expand the concept of “go-to areas”, which we have already successfully implemented for wind energy, to other projects. We want to create more coherence in product and raw materials legislation and prevent double regulation. Reducing bureaucracy should not result in lower social, environmental or safety standards. In order to reduce the EU’s carbon footprint, we must ensure that a large proportion of products originate from Europe when awarding public contracts.

Protecting the internal market from unfair competition

We need to further develop European competition and antitrust law, which should not only focus on competition within Europe, but also increasingly on the global competitive position of European companies. At the same time, we are convinced that even the accumulation of market power in the hands of one company destroys functioning markets, and not just the abuse of this market power. Competition policy must therefore limit market power with the instruments of antitrust legislation and merger control. European competition policy also plays a decisive role in limiting inflation by preventing price increases that do not result from the actual market conditions of supply and demand (greedflation). The corresponding reform of German competition law, which was initiated by the German government, is an important step in the right direction. The harmonisation of insolvency law in the European Union should move ahead with caution and consideration for national regulations.

Skilled labour for Europe

To make our economy fit for the future, we need sufficient labour at all skill levels. In particular, this means well-trained, skilled labour. Demographic change will further exacerbate the existing shortage of skilled labour in coming years. We must therefore make better use of the potential of existing domestic skilled labour and invest in continued training. At the same time, we are dependent on the immigration of skilled labour from outside of Europe. With the Opportunities Residence Act, the Skilled Labour Immigration Act and the reform of the citizenship law, the German government has completed a long overdue paradigm shift towards a modern immigration society. We want and need to work together in Europe to recruit skilled labour in a targeted manner. This requires improved EU skilled labour immigration legislation. Here, the provision of housing must also be considered and not only for workers, but also their families. Immigrants should be offered good integration measures and decent prospects. It must be ensured that immigrants are placed in good, skilled jobs and are not exploited. After all, everyone in Europe has the right to good work.

Boosting innovation

We aim to maximise the potential for innovation in our society and economy in order to actively shape change. Our goal is a unified European knowledge and research environment with a dense network of collaborations, joint projects and specifically funded large-scale future projects in areas such as clean tech, quantum computing and artificial intelligence. We are committed to the EU's IPCEI initiative for the promotion and relocation of strategically important sectors and opening it up to SMEs, as well as significantly accelerating the application process. We will promote open source and open science and sustainable and fair user agreements and ensure that publicly funded research is freely available to the public. All of this comprises the core of scientific sovereignty in a Europe of research and innovation.

Conserving resources in a European circular economy

A future-proof, sustainable economy will require sufficient resources that can be used longer and more efficiently. We therefore need a coordinated EU raw materials strategy that focuses on the diversification of raw material sources, more efficient use of materials, better recycling and increased intra-European procurement and joint research into sustainable alternatives to scarce raw materials.

The primary goal of EU resource policy must be the implementation of the EU waste hierarchy, in which material consumption is first avoided and reduced. With the establishment of a European circular economy on an industrial scale, we can further optimise efficiency in production, reduce our CO² footprint and become less dependent on imports. We want consumers to have the right to have their products repaired at low cost, even after the warranty period has expired and in the event of a defect arising after the purchase of goods. We will abolish unnecessary disposable packaging and make manufacturers responsible for reducing single-use packaging and increasing reuse. We want to reform the textile industry sustainably and put an end to fast fashion. Textiles should last longer, be repairable and recyclable and produced under humane conditions. Manufacturers and retailers must no longer simply destroy unsold goods. We want to reduce scrap exports and at the same time promote circular economy businesses in countries of the Global South. Where emissions are very difficult to avoid – such as in waste incineration, cement production or parts of the chemical industry – we want to capture carbon dioxide within the framework of a circular economy, which includes carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCU). This requires standardised Europe-wide regulations and a common infrastructure.

Reliable framework conditions for a strong healthcare sector and pharmaceutical industry

To ensure the best possible care for patients in Europe, we need a patient-centred healthcare sector, including a

strong pharmaceutical industry. We want reliable framework conditions for Europe as a centre of research, production and innovation as well as more focus on applications. Europe must become attractive for conducting medical studies. We want to cooperate more closely in the areas of research funding, authorisation procedures and data utilisation and use them as a basis for harmonisation. This will enable us to speed up study authorisation and implementation procedures, and significantly reduce bureaucratic burden. The essential foundation of all innovation activities is adequate patent protection. We will therefore endeavour to ensure that innovation and research in Germany and Europe continue to pay off. At the same time we will ensure improved patient access to life-saving medicines. We also support national and European investment grants for production facilities and ensuring security of supply.

2. Renewable, affordable and secure energy supply

Europe's future energy must be renewable, affordable and secure. We have all experienced what happens when our energy supply is largely dependent on rulers like Vladimir Putin. Energy prices have skyrocketed and we have become vulnerable to blackmail. The energy price crisis following the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine was a crisis of fossil fuels. Through a joint effort, we have managed to reduce our dependence on Russia in the short term. Something like this must never happen to us again. We must recognise the diversity of the European continent and its various geographical advantages in order to utilise sustainable energy sources such as the sun or wind as efficiently as possible and work together to secure our energy supply in a European Energy Union.

Completing the European Energy Union

Interconnected national energy grids must grow together into a European grid. Together, we must invest more in the expansion of renewable energies, cross-border hydrogen pipelines and power lines, electrolyzers and harbour infrastructure. This requires standardised and coherent regulatory and funding framework conditions. We are committed to ensuring that the planning and approval of plants and infrastructure for the climate-neutral age become as simple and unbureaucratic as possible. We will also push for the development of a European market for green hydrogen. The production of biofuels must not be allowed to compete with food production. We want to end the use of fuels for power generation that weaken the important but shrinking CO² reservoir of forests. As part of the Green Deal, we were able to ensure for the first time that EU Member States must increase the CO² storage capacities of their peatlands, forests and meadows. When assessing national energy and climate plans, we will take care to ensure that the Member States' plans for the use of bioenergy do not run counter to this. At the same time we want the utilisation of municipal and agricultural waste for the production of biogas to remain possible. It is important to us that the European Energy Union not only focuses on the EU27 but is also open to members of the European Economic Area and EU candidate countries. The completion of the Energy Union is the basis for the modernisation of our economy, industry and society.

Secure international energy relations

Europe will continue to import energy, especially clean energy, but there can no longer be any one-sided dependencies. We are therefore calling for a strategy to diversify the global energy relations of the European Union. We will support the expansion of renewable energies in partner countries and establish global trade in hydrogen.

Reliable and affordable energy prices

The considerable fluctuations in energy prices have hit households and businesses in the EU hard. We therefore want a far-reaching, structural reform of the EU electricity market design to ensure better integration of

renewable energies into the electricity market. The pricing mechanisms for electricity should be reviewed and focussed on renewable energies in order to limit price and feed-in fluctuations. Electricity must become permanently affordable. We aim to create the conditions for competitive electricity and energy prices throughout Europe with reform of the electricity market design and a European framework for bridging electricity prices. We also reiterate our call for a national bridge electricity price. At the same time, we are resolutely pushing ahead with the expansion of renewable energies and the necessary transmission infrastructure. In addition, unjustified profits must be effectively avoided and, in exceptional cases, subject to a windfall levy. The cost advantages of renewable energies should be passed on to all energy consumer groups. In addition, we are expanding the range of instruments that contribute to the renewal of production facilities, such as European climate protection agreements and carbon contracts for difference. We reject the subsidisation of nuclear energy through EU funds. Taxpayers' money should not be channelled into expensive, unreliable and high-risk nuclear technology. The future belongs to renewables, already our most affordable energy sources today.

Energy-efficient housing

We expressly support the initiatives launched in the last European legislative period to bring Europe's building stock in line with the 2030 and 2045 climate targets. Energy-efficient residential buildings are good for protecting the climate as well as for reducing housing and ancillary rental costs for all citizens in the medium and long term. However, the yardstick for assessing climate impact should always be the entire neighbourhood or municipality and not the individual building. At the same time, we reject any form of individual refurbishment obligations for citizens. Member states, local authorities and large property companies should take responsibility. Owners and landlords of single-family homes or flats must be supported in taking the path to 2050 in a self-determined and autonomous manner.

3. A social approach to climate and environmental protection

Climate change threatens our human existence. Rapid action is required. The European Union must be climate-neutral by 2050. Germany is making a significant contribution with its target of achieving climate-neutrality by 2045. So that the EU becomes climate neutral no later than 2050, we support an ambitious, science-based greenhouse gas reduction target for 2040. For the European Union, as the world's second largest economy, this presents a major challenge, but also an economic opportunity. We will ensure that everyone can afford and participate in the transition to climate neutrality. If jobs are secured and the state invests in climate-neutral infrastructure that benefits all, then climate policy will be widely accepted. The implementation of the Green Deal will make energy cheaper and make us less dependent on fossil fuels and raw material imports. The energy transition is a shared European technological and social challenge. Together, we will show that a rigorous policy in favour of climate protection goes hand in hand with social security and fair opportunities.

Social Green Deal

We are the guarantors that the green transition in Europe is fair and socially responsible. With a sustainable industrial and economic policy that focuses on the modernisation of the entire value chain in Europe, jobs are secured and social prosperity is created. A strong welfare state and active social policy with robust national social security systems ensure that no one is left behind by change and that everyone benefits from progress. This should be supported and facilitated by European and national social security systems. In addition, legislation on health and safety at work must be adapted to new climate risks and people should have the right to retraining and continuing education. We want to achieve the targets agreed in Porto at both the European and national level and ensure that at least 60 per cent of employees participate in further training once a year by 2030. We also want a feminist

Green Deal in which all projects to combat the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises are scrutinised for their gender-specific impact on women. With instruments such as the Just Transition Fund and the Social Climate Fund, the Renovation Wave and the good implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds, we want to ensure that all citizens benefit from a green and sustainable future. We will use these funds, for example, for energy-efficient refurbishment, the expansion of e-mobility charging infrastructure and public transport in underserved areas.

Strengthening the European emissions trading system

We believe that the biggest polluters should pay for the consequential costs of climate change. That is why we will further strengthen the European Emissions Trading System as one of the greatest levers to further reduce emissions in the EU. From 2027, the European Emissions Trading Scheme II for buildings and transport must be optimised so that CO² prices become more predictable, reducing the risks associated with investment in sustainable technologies.

Multilateral commitment to global climate neutrality

In order to prevent irreversible changes in the climate system, such as a possible end to the Gulf Stream, we must become carbon-neutral worldwide by 2050 at the latest and end energy generation with fossil fuels. This is why we are continuing to work with our European partners in multilateral forums such as the UNFCCC in favour of an ecological transformation of the global economy. Here, the recommendations of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) provide the main benchmark. New superpowers such as China, India and Brazil must assume greater responsibility in the international community to protect the climate. We would like to motivate more countries to join the Climate Club initiated by Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and which has now grown to 36 countries, so that an ambitious multilateral framework for rapid decarbonisation of the industrial sector can be put in place.

Increase international climate financing

The climate crisis is also a crisis of international justice. While the crisis was caused by the rich countries, it is felt most acutely in poorer countries. We will therefore increase international climate financing and advocate the creation of an international transformation bank. We support the provision of financial aid for climate-related damage and losses in the countries most affected by the climate crisis within the framework of the UN Climate Convention. We want to better coordinate bilateral climate partnerships at the European level and initiate and implement new climate partnerships. The EU must continue to act as a climate pioneer and bridge-builder at international climate conferences. This requires the upgrading and strengthening of climate-focused foreign policy in the European External Action Service and in the EU's representations worldwide.

Effectively protecting the natural world

The climate crisis is closely linked to the biodiversity crisis, which also poses existential threats. The overexploitation and pollution of land and sea as well as invasive animal and plant species have contributed to a severe deterioration of biodiversity and ecosystems. We will therefore take the necessary measures to implement the Montreal Biodiversity Convention and the EU Biodiversity Strategy. We are committed to sustainable agriculture and forestry and want to place 30 per cent of the EU's land and marine area under protection. In doing so, we will maintain and secure the flexibility required for the expansion of renewable energies and construction of the necessary facilities and transmission infrastructure. We want to ensure the responsible use of natural resources and protect human health. We will therefore revise the EU's chemicals policy so that potentially harmful substances are restrict-

ed or banned more quickly and cannot be exported to other parts of the world. Especially where these substances are used more as a convenience, we must quickly restrict their use. In other sectors, we need to develop substances with similar properties to replace harmful ones. It should then be possible to restrict or ban their use in these sectors. We will continue to consistently push for measures to protect nature and demand a zero-tolerance policy from the Commission if EU directives and regulations are not complied with. Infringement procedures due to inadequate implementation of EU conservation rules must be pursued rigorously.

Investing in the restoration of nature

Just protecting that which is still healthy is no longer enough. The state of our natural resources has been deteriorating for years. We must restore nature and the disturbed balance of our ecosystems. We therefore aim to pass ambitious legislation on soil health and provide sufficient funding for nature restoration, also in the context of European agricultural funding, in order to counteract the rampant over-development of land and the loss of natural habitats in the EU.

Sustainable agriculture

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy must do more to achieve the environmental and climate goals it has set itself. At the same time, the current contribution to securing farmers' incomes is not sufficient. European agriculture must therefore be better positioned for the future. To ensure that Germany retains a strong agricultural base of its own in Europe, farmers need favourable and reliable framework conditions. Fair conditions must apply in competition and the necessary changes must be fair. In future, the remuneration of public services, such as sustainable management, the preservation of diverse cultural landscapes, environmental, pollinator, water and soil protection and the expansion of natural CO² sinks, will play a central role. This should result in fair food prices as well as an income for the provision of public services. We are striving to transform agricultural funding so that it focuses even more on aspects of climate protection, climate adaptation and biodiversity. The framework conditions for sustainable agriculture must be created in such a way that comprehensive food security within Europe can be achieved while at the same time preserving natural resources and complying with sustainability criteria (ecological, economic and social). Urgently needed reforms to update agricultural policy so that it meets the objectives of the Green Deal must be implemented. We want to continue to significantly reduce the use of pesticides. We support the goal of organic farming on 25 per cent of land in Europe. Here, the increased use of digital technology, AI and drones will play a central role. We oppose genetic engineering in the conventional sense but the use of new genomic techniques (CRISPR/Cas, genetic scissors) will be examined with an open mind. The precautionary principle and a comprehensive risk assessment in each case before any potential authorisation have top priority for us because new genetic engineering techniques can also result in undesirable effects. Consumers who do not want genetically modified plants on their plates must have freedom of choice. Therefore, if new genetic engineering technologies are approved, the traceability and labelling of products made with genetically modified plants becomes indispensable.

For the first time in the history of European agricultural policy and at the initiative of the Social Democrats, compliance with minimum social standards will be a condition for receiving European funding, in addition to climate and environmental protection. This newly introduced social component in the CAP must be expanded. Wage labourers and seasonal workers deserve to be treated fairly, while fair employers and farm managers deserve to be treated favourably.

Protecting water as a public good

Large parts of Europe are suffering from extreme drought and heavy rainfall events. This not only threatens

productive farming but also increases the risk of flood disasters. We are therefore calling for a European water strategy that takes a holistic approach to water problems and involves all sectors of the economy and consumers. We aim to improve water retention in our countryside.

European marine conservation and fisheries policy

Many fish populations in the EU suffer from overfishing. We want a European fisheries policy with science-based catch quotas that enables the recovery of overfished stocks and puts an end to harmful fishing subsidies. Through stricter controls on illegal, undocumented and unregulated fishing, we want to prevent overfishing. We will place at least 30 per cent of European marine areas under protection and restore at least 20 per cent of damaged marine ecosystems by 2030. We need open dialogue with the fishing industry so that investment, new business models and practices can be effectively supported and implemented.

Improving animal welfare

Animal suffering cannot be justified, especially not for economic ends. In animal husbandry, we must therefore consistently focus on improving livestock welfare. We are calling for standardised labelling of husbandry practices across Europe and an animal welfare label for all unprocessed and processed animal products to enable consumers to make informed purchasing decisions. The transport of live animals should last no longer than eight hours in the EU. We also need a ban on live animal transport to non-EU countries where compliance with animal welfare legislation cannot be guaranteed. We are also continuing to work to protect the welfare of wild and domestic animals.

4. Digitalisation for the people

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence (AI) are transforming every aspect of our lives and the economy. We need therefore a coherent and harmonised digital policy that covers all areas of life and involves all Europeans – a true realisation of the Digital Union. Europe has achieved many milestones in recent years, such as the Digital Services Act, and has proven that a united Europe, with its shared values, can play a pioneering role in the digital world when it comes to the democratic, sovereign and equitable shaping of digitalisation. We wish to continue along this path. We aim to utilise the potential of digital technologies for progress and prosperity in Europe. The latest technological developments have also made clear that we need to become more independent and more crisis-resistant. This is why we must strengthen the development and expand production of key digital and network technologies as well as computing capacities, such as European AI models, and provide even more financial support than previously.

With everything that is technically possible, we must prioritise opportunities without losing sight of the risks and challenges. The essential pillars guiding our actions are our shared common European values and a people-centred approach to the digital transformation.

Protection, trust and autonomy in the digital space

In both the analogue and digital worlds, we are committed to protection against discrimination and believe that fundamental rights such as data protection, privacy and freedom of expression and assembly must be guaranteed. To this aim, citizens must be better informed about their rights. In cases where people's lives are significantly impacted, we must ensure that it is the people who make the final decisions and have the ability to act accordingly. Legal recourse against court decisions must remain possible.

The protection of privacy and the confidentiality of communication are key prerequisites for citizens' trust in

digitalisation. The confidentiality of digital communication is essential when it comes to safeguarding fundamental rights and freedoms, and our democracy. We therefore reject any form of mass surveillance, efforts to bypass or crack encryption, the retention of vulnerabilities and the use of spyware by private or state actors. We are just as firmly opposed to the unwarranted storage of data and the unauthorised monitoring of digital communication.

We want citizens to have control over their own data in a Digital Union. Digital profiling jeopardises privacy and democracy, can lead to discrimination and result in misinformation and manipulation used for advertising purposes or to gain political influence. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) represents a quantum leap in data protection policy and demonstrates the outstanding performance of European solutions. It has become a global model that many countries have adopted. At the same time, the implementation of GDPR has also shown that some of the rules overshoot the mark and that citizens and small volunteer organisations and small and medium-sized enterprises are burdened with more bureaucracy than necessary. We are therefore in favour of consistent implementation and further fine-tuning of GDPR. In addition to a high level of protection for privacy and consumers, we also aim to reduce bureaucracy and propel digital progress. The regulation of platforms should therefore be evaluated and, if necessary, optimised.

Effective and coherent governance

In recent years, the EU has introduced many pieces of legislation such as the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and, most recently, the AI Act. As a next step, we want to ensure that sufficient resources are available to implement the legislation effectively so that the requirements can be introduced in the Member States in a transparent, solutions-oriented and consistent manner.

Promoting democracy and combating disinformation

People are increasingly confronted with mis and disinformation, deep fakes and other manipulations. Whether deliberate or out of neglect, the manipulative impact of fake news undermines solidarity in our society and the resilience of our democracy. We must protect the European public and our democratic institutions from these influences. We must not only focus on disinformation coming from the outside, but must also combat disinformation originating from within the EU.

Measures should include clear rules for digital platforms, such as those developed in Europe in recent years. To combat fake news and online hate speech, we are committed to the effective enforcement of these rules through strong governance. We also wish to support the creation of non-commercial and decentralised digital communication and trading platforms across Europe. They should form a genuine alternative to the commercial platforms. We also need effective rules and sanctions against deep fakes.

The right of access to knowledge is one of the great achievements of the Enlightenment. In the analogue age, this access was guaranteed and promoted by public libraries and universities. In the digital space, access to reliable information is much more difficult; different licence conditions often apply to physical books and e-books, for example, and the results of publicly funded research are often not freely available. We will therefore campaign for an Open Knowledge Act that breaks down barriers and facilitates public access to knowledge of all kinds.

Ensuring digital sovereignty

In addition to clear rules for digital markets and services and the use of data in accordance with fundamental rights, strengthening our digital sovereignty requires greater technological and economic independence. We must become more autonomous in the development, production and use of digital technologies and become

crisis-proof in the face of threats such as cyberattacks from abroad, especially when it comes to protecting critical infrastructure. Digital platforms and, in the future, artificial intelligence will become essential components of our infrastructure and public services. In these fields, we want to minimise our dependence on suppliers from outside of Europe. We also need to protect our democratic processes, including our elections, not only from disinformation, but also from cyberattacks. Companies that respect our fundamental rights instead of exploiting them should be given preferential treatment in public procurement. Finally, we should foster the use of open-source software.

AI models with European values

Algorithmic decision-making systems can relieve administrative burdens, create new jobs and improve health-care. But they can also violate consumer and human rights, and this applies as well to other types of artificial intelligence. The development and use of artificial intelligence technologies must remain in line with European values. This is why we want to prevent the renewed dominance of large tech monopolies in the development and dissemination of AI models. In particular when it comes to those used in public administration processes or where there is a high degree of public interest, such as in healthcare, we aim to develop generally accessible AI models on a European scale and according to European values in order to avoid dependencies and set global standards that are “Made in Europe”. We want to make the Member States the drivers of these developments through innovations that are “Made in Europe”, e.g. in the field of AI or, in future, quantum computing, and thus ensure their scaling up. We want to simplify and accelerate access to funding. We also want to enable bundled, European cutting-edge research in the field of AI in order to train and retain specialists in Europe. We favour independent data protection authorities, impact assessments, and transparency and labelling obligations within the EU. This applies in particular to AI foundation models. It is also important to support small and medium-sized enterprises in the use of AI and to promote open-source approaches in the field.

An open and free internet

The principle of net neutrality is a cornerstone of the open and free internet and is not up for debate when it comes to the expansion of network infrastructure. Fair, equal internet access without restrictions for all users and services must be guaranteed. We reject any unequal treatment of certain content by network providers. This also means that high-speed internet must be affordable for all.

5. Transforming Europe into a mobility union

The free movement of goods, services and people is one of the European Union’s major achievements. People benefit from it both privately and professionally. The challenge is to make mobility climate-neutral, reliable and affordable as quickly as possible. Together with our European partners, we are rising to this challenge and ushering in a genuine European mobility transition. This requires a transformation in all areas of transport, including private transport, public transport and freight transport. Transport planning from a European perspective is also necessary to better connect border regions. This will promote economic development throughout Europe and open up the possibility of shifting to more climate-neutral means of transport. At the same time, European solutions can simplify everyday life for mobile Europeans.

Developing shared European rail routes

Germany has the largest rail network in Europe. We are spending a total of 45 billion euros on modernisation of the network. We also want to utilise this collective national effort to invest in the construction and expansion of European railway lines. Building on the goal of a regular, high-frequency schedule in Germany, we want to create

the conditions for a European rail schedule which, in addition to improving punctuality, also emphasises links to European networks. We will improve the capacity, reliability, accessibility, availability and seamless cross-border operation of rail freight transport in the Union.

European trains as an alternative to flying

We aim to actively promote the trend towards climate-friendly night trains and establish a European night train network. In the short term, we want to introduce more high-speed ICE trains to compete with short-haul flights. Rail travel within Europe should be cheaper and more attractive than flying. The establishment of competitive and innovative high-speed train connections and night trains should be supported by all Member States, as they represent an environmentally friendly and competitive alternative in international transport.

Clean mobility for all

As Social Democrats, we are committed to ensuring that all segments of the population have access to climate-friendly transport solutions and that no one is disadvantaged on the basis of social status or income. This also includes the promotion of public transport in rural areas and the preservation of good jobs in the transport sector. The transition to climate-friendly public transport should be significantly accelerated across Europe.

European ticket for public transport and a Europe-wide ticketing app

The flat-rate Deutschlandticket is a great success. Together, we want to ensure that it is also recognised in our neighbouring countries, such as France. This should ease the burden on commuters in border regions and make holiday travel easier and cheaper. Our vision is a European ticket that is valid throughout the EU. We also want a cross-transport, Europe-wide booking option for international trains, buses and other mobility services on behalf of the public transport services – with a mobile app that can be used throughout the EU. Together with our neighbours we intend to introduce an EU-wide ticketing system. Rail discount cards should be fully valid for international rail travel.

Free Interrail ticket for all 18-year-olds

DiscoverEU is a successful European Union project. Every year, thousands of young people get to know Europe by train with a free Interrail ticket. In future, all 18-year-olds in the EU should be offered this opportunity. So that young people with low incomes can also afford to travel, we want to gradually make uncomplicated funding of the programme possible via Erasmus+. We wish to expand the DiscoverEU Youth Card programme, which offers discounts on accommodation, meals, sport, culture, learning activities and public transport.

More freight transport by rail

We are striving to significantly increase the transition of freight transport from road to rail. This is a crucial part of achieving the Union's energy efficiency and climate targets. We must support the rail sector more and encourage more efficient use of the network. Around three quarters of freight transport is currently transported by truck, i.e. around 1.3 million trucks a day. One goods train alone could replace up to 62 trucks! By 2030, we want to increase the share of rail freight to 30 per cent of all freight transport for routes over 300 kilometres and to more than 50 percent by 2050. Boosting rail freight transport in the EU requires greater capacity, reliability, availability and seamless cross-border operations. To achieve all of this, we are focussing on efficient European freight corridors and the digitalisation of the railways. In particular, we support EU-wide introduction of Digital Automatic Coupling (DAC).

Expanding infrastructure for electric and hydrogen-powered mobility

We want to pave the way for electric and hydrogen-powered mobility. To this end, rapid electric charging stations must be installed at least every 60 kilometres and hydrogen filling stations every 200 kilometres. We also need European support through targeted EU funding, start-up financing and pilot projects for shared mobility services, micro-mobility and autonomous driving. We need reliability through clear European regulations and sufficient funding. These should also be available for research and development and for the establishment of key technologies, the battery cell industry and autonomous driving.

Climate-neutral air and sea transport, European ports and airports

Sustainable aviation fuels, such as e-kerosene, are a decisive step towards drastically reducing the aviation industry's CO² emissions. More than 200,000 additional jobs could be created in Europe in this field. This opens up new training and education opportunities in the production of sustainable aviation fuels. It is important to us that fuel production does not compete with food production. We want to introduce an EU label for the environmental impact of flying. This will enable passengers to compare the environmental footprint of flights and make informed decisions. We also want more stringent requirements on the use of sustainable fuels in cargo ships and help port cities rapidly install shore power systems.

6. Financing the future

The ecological and digital transformation of the European economy and our society requires a high level of investment. This includes both public and private investment. There is no doubt that this requires an enormous effort, but one thing is clear: We are investing in our future prosperity and a future worth living in. In times of ongoing economic uncertainty, we continue to rely on fiscal flexibility within the EU. In the response to the pandemic, we saw the role that far-sighted fiscal policy can play in stabilising the economy. This state capacity to act in times of crisis remains important. The decisive factor should however be the capacity for innovation, adaptability and performance of companies and not the fiscal capacity of individual member states.

Investing in the future together

With the historic European Recovery Fund, we boldly broke new ground under the leadership of then German Finance Minister, Olaf Scholz. Next Generation EU has provided a decisive impetus for sustainable investment in the future. Together with the SURE crisis instrument for short-time work, we were able to provide a powerful response to the crisis during the pandemic. We want to turn this strong sign of European solidarity into lasting progress on the road towards integration. We are committed to creating permanent and suitable instruments to support the European economy and its workers in the transformation and to counter acute crisis situations through joint borrowing in the spirit of solidarity. After all, more public funds are necessary to meet the challenges of the socio-ecological transformation. We would like to further develop the SURE crisis instrument and ensure that all Member States can maintain their important social security systems even in times of severe economic crises through a permanent European unemployment re-insurance scheme, without the need for permanent cash transfers.

Creating scope for investment

We intend to reform European state aid legislation so that the necessary investments can be made at the right time. To this end, we aim to accelerate authorisation procedures. The authorisation of aid should be consistently linked to compliance with social and environmental criteria. Even countries with higher debt levels must

be able to master the climate-neutrality and digital transformations and make social investments. We therefore urgently need a determined, coordinated and solidarity-based European investment policy. The transformation of the European economy can only succeed if companies in all Member States benefit from public support programmes. Otherwise, the competitiveness of the single market as a whole is at risk, which would also be to the detriment of the German economy, which benefits the most from an efficient internal market. A flexibilisation of EU state aid rules therefore requires that fiscally weaker member states can utilise European funds in the sense of a common investment policy.

Reform of the Stability and Growth Pact

We will continue to improve the Stability and Growth Pact. The aim is to enable future investment in the climate-friendly restructuring of our economies and to boost digitalisation. This entails establishing realistic and binding rules for debt reduction and at the same time ensuring the comprehensibility and transparency of the pact. We will secure sustainable public finances in all European countries without rigid austerity policies returning to Europe. The current German government, led by the Social Democrats, has succeeded in reaching an agreement among the Member States on a reform of European fiscal rules. Unlike the conservatives in the financial crisis, it has brought Europe together on this sensitive issue instead of dividing it. Member States will in future be able to agree to individual debt paths with the European Commission which are based on realistic common standards. We reject rigid rules on borrowing for Member States as they prevent investment and impair the ability of states to act. We favour further democratisation in economic policy coordination and in strengthening the role of the European Parliament in the European Semester. The policy recommendations within the framework of the European Semester must align with fundamental EU policy objectives, such as the Green Deal or the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Competitive funding for European companies

In order to promote investment and ensure competitive funding for European companies, a common, functioning European capital market must finally be created. To this end, we will increase political pressure for the completion of a banking union and, above all, a Capital Markets Union with appropriate oversight. This will make it possible for private capital to be mobilised across borders and channelled into companies. These companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, will be able to utilise the capital markets as a means of financing more easily and to a greater extent than before. At the same time, savers will benefit from broader access to investment opportunities to accumulate assets and save for their retirement. A fully realised Capital Markets Union can make an important contribution to strengthening financial stability through greater diversification in corporate financing and by boosting international competitiveness. We will create an integrated and liquid European capital and banking market and break up financial fragmentation within Europe. This will boost growth and jobs and enhance investor protections. In particular, opportunities for start-ups in Europe must be improved significantly.

Creating opportunities for urban and rural areas

All people should enjoy the same chances to realise their potential, regardless of where they live. Rural areas and small and medium-sized towns account for over 80 per cent of the EU's surface area, where around a third of the EU population live. These regions fulfil diverse and key functions for society as living, economic, recreational, cultural and environmental areas. Our aim is to support cities, coastal regions and rural areas in the sustainable transformation of our societies and to prevent individual regions from being left behind in the process. An investment policy that shows people what Europe can specifically do for them has proven its worth, particularly in eastern Germany, where the catch-up process has been a success. We will continue to provide sustainable funding for European regional policy in the future. Together with the social partners and

civil society, our cities and regions should continue to decide as unbureaucratically as possible which local investments they wish to co-finance with EU funds. From 2028, we aim to expand the European Structural and Investment Funds into a genuine transformation instrument that ensures socially just change and at the same time promotes innovation. We will protect EU structural funds even better against misuse by authoritarian governments.

A robust EU budget

If you wish to develop the European Union further, you must be prepared to provide its budget with the necessary financial resources. We are calling for a European budget that is up to the challenges of our time. We are calling for the next Multiannual Financial Framework in 2027 to include the EU's key policy areas that deliver recognisable European added value. We believe that if the EU takes on a wide range of new tasks, as it has done in recent years, it should also receive the required funding.

To this end, we want to make the EU more financially independent of national governments. We want to relieve the German budget of contributions to the European budget and replace them with funds generated by the EU itself. Revenues generated by European policies belong in the EU budget.

Strengthening the revenue side requires European coordination and corporate taxation rules that effectively prevent tax avoidance and evasion by internationally active companies. With a minimum tax rate of 15 per cent at the OECD level, we have already reached an important milestone but now it is important to implement the agreements in all Member States and use the funds to strengthen the EU budget. Our goal is a uniform basic European corporate income tax of 15 per cent on a uniform assessment basis. In the short term, we want to introduce a comprehensive financial transaction tax on all securities and foreign exchange transactions, as well as an EU tax on corporate share buybacks. We will also strengthen the EU budget through revenue from the new carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM). EU levies should not only fulfil a revenue function, but also contribute to achieving our political goals. As a party of social justice, we aspire to combat social inequality in Europe. EU funds must therefore be linked to criteria such as good jobs and collective bargaining.

III. A strong Europe in the world

The growing number of conflicts in the world is causing people to seek protection or a better life in Europe, leading to rising prices and supply bottlenecks. The rules and institutions of global cooperation face growing pressure, and the war in Ukraine has seriously shaken the European security architecture.

We therefore need a strong Europe that defends our common values of peace, freedom and democracy and is committed to being a force for peace in the world; a Europe that takes a stand against poverty and marginalisation and for peace, development and human rights. The EU's enlargement policy is an instrument of enormous transformative power. A growing Europe must be a better Europe. The Europe of 35 and more states cannot be run in the same way as today's Europe of 27, which is why we are in favour of internal reform, reformed institutions and leaner decision-making processes. Enlargement and reform must go hand in hand.

The European Union is already showing that cooperation makes us stronger than confrontation. We therefore need to look even harder for common ground between the member states and speak with one voice in the world. We will realign European trade policy and invest more in strategic partnerships in order to secure important resources, but also to advocate peaceful conflict resolution, sustainable development and renewed trust

in international relations. In doing so, we will treat the countries of the Global South as equal partners. We are committed to ensuring that the feminist perspective is always considered. We favour a solidarity-based migration and refugee policy that balances a humane approach and the maintenance of order.

1. For a peaceful Europe

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought war back to the European continent. From the policy of détente under Willy Brandt, we know that military strength is vital when it comes to protecting the European peace project. This is why we want to strengthen the European pillar of NATO and take more responsibility for our own security. Through the permanent stationing of a German brigade in Lithuania and the investment in joint air defence (European Sky Shield Initiative, ESSI) announced by Olaf Scholz, we are already increasing our contribution to NATO in terms of quality and conceptually, and we wish to further broaden this commitment. At the same time, as the party of peace in Germany, we will continue to focus on diplomacy and dialogue, civilian crisis prevention and peace-building as well as disarmament and arms control. Security and peace are inseparable, but peace is more than security. The triad of diplomacy, international development and defence policy therefore remains the cornerstone of Social Democratic international policy.

Our vision of a European army

We Social Democrats have long harboured the vision of a European army, because we know that joint investment and organisation of our armed forces can result in important synergy effects. In line with the strategic compass of the European Union, we want the Union to become a more capable security actor. Even if NATO retains its central role of defending our alliance, we want to put Europe in an increasingly independent position when it comes to ensuring security from external threats. We are committed to greater harmonisation with respect to training soldiers in the EU and the strengthening of efficient, democratically legitimised decision-making structures in the Common Security and Defence Policy. For us, this includes in particular the involvement of the European Parliament, the strengthening of the office of the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the establishment of an independent Council of Defence Ministers.

More joint European procurement

With the special fund for the Bundeswehr, we have demonstrated that we are prepared to commit the necessary financial resources to make Europe more effective when it comes to security and defence. We must ensure that the investments that have been initiated continue. We are committed to sustainable defence spending of at least two per cent of GDP. We want to create more incentives for collaborative defence spending at the European level by better equipping European funds (EDF, EDIP). We are committed to greater transparency of coordinated European defence planning in order to increase the pressure on Member States to fulfil their commitments. We also want more synergies between NATO and EU planning processes and better coordination between the various innovation initiatives.

A single European market for defence

Through more joint development and procurement, we aim to achieve more standardisation and interoperability in Europe. We want to actively promote and financially support joint defence projects. In doing so, we will also focus on creating more standardised certification procedures and procurement cycles. We must also harmonise regulations in Europe in order to facilitate and accelerate the transport of reinforcements to NATO's eastern border. We should encourage gradual liberalisation of the European defence market for products that are not considered key national technologies.

Actively pursuing disarmament and arms control

Especially in times of global rearmament, it is our duty as Europeans to actively promote disarmament and arms control initiatives, as they belong to a forward-looking security policy. We will therefore actively campaign for an international set of rules on armed drones as well as arms control and effective regulation with respect to bioweapons, cyberwarfare and artificial intelligence. We remain committed to the long-term goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Common European arms export policy

The war in Ukraine has made it clear that we need a more strategic approach to our arms export policy. As Social Democrats, we have carefully considered every weapons delivery to Ukraine. An internal defence market requires an agreement on arms exports at the European level since various rules stand in the way of joint development and production. We therefore favour a common and coordinated European arms export policy based on shared values and strategic priorities. European defence technology must not fall into the wrong hands. At the same time, we must provide better and more reliable support to our strategic partners.

2. A European Union for all Europeans

The EU's enlargement policy was and is a driving force for peace, democracy, the rule of law and prosperity in Europe. We want to build on this success story. We aim to use the opportunity to support our European neighbours in a lasting democratic transformation, to ensure that other players do not take the place of the EU. After all, the EU's enlargement policy is one of the most important instruments of EU foreign policy.

Accelerating the accession of the Western Balkan states

Over 20 years ago, the EU opened up the prospect of accession to the Western Balkan nations. After years of delay, it is high time that these countries are swiftly accepted into the heart of our community once accession criteria have been met. We are generally in favour of establishing recognisable intermediate steps in the enlargement process and want to examine the extent to which, for example, access to the single market can be granted even before full EU membership.

Ukrainian EU membership

We are committed to Ukraine and Moldova joining the EU as soon as they fulfil the accession criteria. Citizens and governments in both countries leave no doubt that they are ready to live the European idea, and that they are already orientated towards common values and long for the protection of the community to be able to live in peace and freedom. For a successful Eastern European policy, we must create the necessary conditions for the accession of Ukraine, Moldova and, in the future, Georgia – and politically secure the accession of these countries. With enlargement, we will send a clear signal against the unilateral shifting of borders by Putin's Russia, commit ourselves to the joint reconstruction of Ukraine and enable people who strive for peace, freedom, the rule of law and democracy to gain access to our community of values.

European values as a fundamental prerequisite

We will base the admission of new Member States even more strongly than before on our European values and place democracy, human rights and the rule of law at the centre of the process. The Copenhagen criteria must always be fulfilled as a basic prerequisite. If fundamental EU principles are disregarded, the EU must be consistent and uphold its values vis-à-vis individual Member States.

Deepening our relationship with our neighbours

We want to become more flexible in our cooperation with our European neighbours, because we benefit from bringing them closer to us. To this end, alongside long-established forms of cooperation, we recognise the potential of the European Political Community. Even independently of the EU enlargement process, it is crucial to build trust and actively identify common interests with our neighbours in areas such as sustainable energy, infrastructure and security.

The democratic Baltic Sea region also has an important role to play. It is one of the most innovative and competitive regions in the world. Alongside the necessary transformational challenges that affect all Baltic Sea states equally are: the protection of the Baltic, energy independence, the reorientation of security policy, coping with the consequences of demographic change, safeguarding public services (especially in rural areas), future-oriented digitalisation and the safe use of artificial intelligence.

Strengthen the EU's capability to act

The enlargement of the European Union must go hand in hand with treaty reforms. Only a European Union that is capable of taking action will be in a strong position to welcome new members. Even today – with 27 Member States – the decision-making processes make it difficult for the Union and its ability to react in times of crisis. In the face of global challenges, we need efficient democratic decision-making structures that take into account increasing complexity. Institutional reform is therefore a prerequisite for the enlargement of the European Union. The Conference on the Future of Europe, in which thousands of European citizens participated, arrived at the same conclusion. At the same time, we want to strengthen the foundations – the values and democracy – on which the European Union is built. The question of the rule of law is not an internal matter of each Member State. Rather, violations present a threat to the entire Union. Only if the EU manages to defend itself against internal enemies of democracy will it be able to credibly stand up for its values in the world.

Reform decision-making processes

The veto rights of individual Member States in the European Council, which already hinder the progress of the Union and are used as a means of exerting pressure, must become a thing of the past. An essential institutional reform is therefore the replacement of the principle of unanimity in the Council, where it still applies today, with the introduction of majority voting. This will make the EU more agile, more responsive and more democratic. If a sovereign Europe is our aspiration, then majority decisions mean a gain, not a loss of sovereignty.

Asserting common values

Our common European values apply to all Member States, without exception. For us, it is essential that we protect democracy, the rule of law and human rights in the EU. To this end, we must deploy existing protection instruments with greater rigour and develop new instruments to protect our common values. For example, in the event of violations of the rule of law, infringement proceedings should be pursued much more rigorously than before. In addition, the European Council must urgently apply the fundamental values procedure of Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union (EU Treaty) and withdraw the voting rights of Member States that systematically violate fundamental values. This is the only way we can prevent increasingly undemocratic Member States from abusing their veto rights and holding the Union hostage.

It is therefore also necessary to adjust procedures to safeguard fundamental values in Article 7 of the EU Treaty. The European Parliament should be granted more powers and it must no longer be possible for individual Member States to block sanctions in the Council. We also call on the European Commission to bring Member

States that violate the values set out in Article 2 of the EU Treaty before the European Court of Justice. In future, it should no longer be possible for states that seriously violate the values set out in Article 2 to assume the EU Council Presidency.

Financial sanctions for violations

There is also a need for stricter financial sanctions for breaches of the EU's shared values. In recent years, we have made it possible for EU funds to be withheld from countries that violate the rule of law. We must extend this type of sanction to all offences against the values of Article 2 of the EU Treaty, especially when the Union's budget is not directly threatened. The European Commission must take more consistent action in future. Finally, we call for an independent Copenhagen Commission to monitor whether the Commission and the Council are applying existing instruments.

Strengthening European democracy

A central element in strengthening European democracy is the expansion of the role of the European Parliament as the central point of citizen representation. This includes a genuine right of initiative with which the directly elected representatives of the people can initiate legislative proposals instead of only being able to call for proposals from the Commission.

We will also give citizens the opportunity to have a direct say in the leadership of the EU Commission by casting their vote on election day and by advocating the official establishment of the Spitzenkandidat principle. Who can become President of the Commission should be determined in advance in a transparent manner that is visible to all citizens. This will enable EU citizens to directly influence the direction of European policy and make a significant contribution to strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the European Union. We should also bring together candidates from different Member States in single European constituencies. These transnational lists would strengthen the European dimension of the European elections and result in greater emphasis on European issues in the election campaign. It goes without saying that we favour equal representation on electoral lists so that the proportion of women in society is reflected in the composition of the European Parliament.

European policy that listens to the people

Democracy is the guarantor of citizens' trust in European institutions and decision-making processes. Only in a strong and vibrant democracy can people freely articulate their wishes and interests and realise them together in society. The Conference on the Future of Europe as an innovative and participatory form of civic participation clearly demonstrated the desire for a more effective European Union. We are committed to ensuring that the proposals made there are reflected in European legislation. In particular, we support the proposal to abolish the principle of unanimity where it is already possible under existing treaties. The implementation of citizens' more far-reaching suggestions requires amendments to EU treaties, as they concern either policy areas in which the EU does not yet have competences or would require changes to the institutional architecture of the EU. We are therefore campaigning with our European partners for the creation of a European Convention.

Creating trust through transparency

To strengthen citizens' trust in EU institutions we want to ensure that decisions are made in the interest of the common good. To this end, we aim to improve the transparency and accountability of EU institutions by advocating the establishment of a strong European ethics authority that sets common ethics standards for all EU institutions and monitors their implementation and compliance.

4. Strategically expand international partnerships

A strong Europe should build global networks. International cooperation is a prerequisite for the prosperity and security of the European Union. That is why we are working to strengthen the rules-based international order, coordinating even more closely with our European partners and investing in strategic partnerships. Chancellor Olaf Scholz has already successfully advocated cooperation within the G7, the G20 and the United Nations, and defined common interests with non-European countries. We will continue to support and expand this commitment.

Making Europe the partner of choice

Many countries in the Global South have turned their backs on the promises of liberal democracy, because they do not see their expectations fulfilled. Europe must respond to this tendency with attractive and fair offers to win countries back as partners for projects and initiatives that uphold common values and interests. We aim to break up unequal and neoliberal power structures in North-South relations, strengthen human rights, promote democracy and sustainable development. For us, the yardstick for cooperation with international partners are the 17 sustainability goals of the United Nations' Agenda 2030, which were jointly adopted by the global community.

Peacekeeping and peacebuilding

Many countries around the world see Europe not only as a partner for security and prosperity, but also as a partner for peace. It is time for Europe to take more responsibility for peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Conflicts and wars often have social, economic and ecological causes. These must be recognised and combated at an early stage. A feminist foreign and peace policy that takes all members of a society into consideration and strives to overcome patriarchal and post-colonial power structures must form the indispensable basis of our approach. In conflicts, gender-specific violence and other mechanisms of oppression continue to occur.

We are therefore committed to boosting the rights, resources and representation of women, girls and marginalised groups in all their diversity and supporting feminist movements, for example in Iran. Since the murder of Jina Emîni by the Iranian morality police, many critics of the regime have been fighting against the mullahs' government and for a self-determined life. The mullahs' regime reacts to these protests with brute force, and imprisons and tortures protesters. In 2023 alone, 600 people were executed by the regime. We stand firmly at the side of the courageous freedom fighters of Iran.

International cultural and education policy are other important factors in conflict prevention.

It is therefore crucial to involve civil society and, above all, to promote civil conflict prevention more extensively. In this way, we are investing in sustainably positive experiences with Europe and promoting educational, cultural and scientific exchange. We will campaign for sufficient funding.

Strengthening the transatlantic partnership

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is making transatlantic commonalities more evident than they have been for a long time. The United States is Europe's most important security partner worldwide and one of its key economic and trading partners. We wish to deepen trade relations, for example, by better utilising the structures of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council. Our long-term goal is a common transatlantic economic area with fair trading conditions in which industrial tariffs are abolished, and barriers to market access for future technologies, especially in the fields of decarbonisation, digitalisation and the circular economy are removed, and common standards are defined.

A common European policy on China

China is our partner, competitor and systemic rival. Key global challenges cannot be overcome without China. The country is an important market for European companies. At the same time, European companies compete with Chinese firms for market share and innovation – and China is working to restructure the international system in its favour. We want Europe to speak with one voice with regards to its interests and values and are therefore calling for the development of a clear and consistent European strategy for relations with China that integrates existing concepts and decisions and adapts them where necessary. We want to drive cooperation on global challenges, promote respect for the universality of human rights and strengthen multilateralism. At the same time, we need a European resilience strategy that reduces risk (de-risking), also with a view to protecting critical infrastructure in Europe. We need to diversify our economic ties in order to minimise economic dependencies, particularly in the procurement of raw materials, following the principle of “China plus one”, in which we always have alternative suppliers besides China. This also means alongside the European Supply Chain Act, we will prohibit the import of products produced by forced labour.

Advancing the reform of the United Nations

To overcome the challenges of our time – poverty, climate change, biodiversity loss, migration, pandemics, wars – we need global answers. These can only emerge within the framework of a rules-based international order. We therefore wish to work together to bolster functioning multilateral institutions and international agreements. We want to further strengthen the EU’s cooperation within the United Nations. We want the United Nations Security Council to become more representative of the world. We therefore favour a reform of the Security Council, under which the Security Council will initially be expanded to include additional nation states, especially from the Global South. We advocate more participatory rights for the European Union in the UN. We also want to strengthen the World Health Organisation politically and financially. As a lesson learnt from the pandemic, we intend to establish short-term and long-term forms of cooperation that ensure global participation in technology, essential knowledge, data and information. Together, we will be better prepared for future pandemics and the impact of climate change on the healthcare system.

A more European approach to development cooperation

The EU – together with its Member States – is already the world’s largest donor in the field of development cooperation and the largest promoter of democracy. We want to build on this position – both in the interests of our partner countries and in our own interests, because achievement of the 2030 Agenda and ensuring prosperity and security requires a long-term investment. We stand behind the target of spending at least 0.7 per cent of gross national income on development cooperation. Focus must be placed on the least developed countries (LDCs). A feminist approach is also important to us in development policy. Projects should be implemented together with our partners in the Global South and with particular regard to social, ecological and gender-specific inequalities and the fight against climate change. We are committed to a common approach to global development and want to better pool our strengths at the European level. This is why we want to further enhance the role of the Commissioner for International Partnerships and strengthen the supervisory function of the European Parliament in order to ensure that development policy projects are implemented in a focussed manner.

The European Global Gateway initiative needs a fresh start, in order to become a visible response to

China’s Belt and Road Initiative (New Silk Road). To this end, we want to better coordinate and bundle infrastructure projects. European investments in future-relevant infrastructure must come from a single source. We will ensure that the investments are developed and implemented together with partner countries in order to be

sustainable and effective on the ground. Successful projects, such as the new transport corridor between India and Europe initiated by us and our partners at the G20 summit in New Delhi, demonstrate the geopolitical relevance of such offensives.

Creating financial room for development

Together with our European partners, we are campaigning for greater tax justice, transparency and disclosure rights as well as global minimum taxation so that our international partners can use the added value they have created to invest in their future. We favour conditional debt relief programmes in which the savings from the debt relief are invested in social and sustainable projects. We need a debt relief programme for the countries of the Global South that includes state, intergovernmental and private institutions. We also want to establish further partnerships to mobilise public and private investment to bundle sustainable value creation and enable socio-ecological growth through progressive regulation. In doing so, we will ensure that the focus remains on the goal of combating inequality.

5. A new direction for European trade policy

Europe's sustainable development and good jobs in Germany depend largely on trade. At the same time, we know that the neoliberal fantasy that trade automatically leads to prosperity gains for all, political change and greater security in the world is over. Moreover, in our globalised world, economic means are increasingly being used to settle geopolitical conflicts. We therefore need a progressive trade policy that improves the realities of people's lives, not only in Europe, but also in our trading partners. We want a strong Europe that is resilient and strategically uses economic policy tools to protect our values and interests.

Diversify trading partners – especially for raw materials

The recent crises have made it clear that Europe suffers from one-sided dependencies in sensitive areas, be it energy imports, raw materials, rare earths or medicines. This is why we want to diversify our trading partners and supply chains, to create a resilient Europe that will be able to withstand future crises. A particular focus must be placed on the raw materials which are central to the socio-ecological transformation. We therefore need cooperation with resource-rich countries on an equal footing. These partnerships must consider the political interests and economic development needs of our partners as central. Both sides must benefit from raw materials partnerships. Developing and emerging countries in particular must be enabled to create more value locally, also through targeted support. In line with the Supply Chain Act, we must take care to avoid negative impacts on human rights, the environment and the climate.

Anchoring enforceable standards in European trade agreements

Trade agreements that only aim to dismantle customs barriers and liberalise markets are no longer suitable for our time. Instead, we want comprehensive trade and investment agreements that include binding social (e.g. ILO core labour standards, governance conventions), human rights and environmental standards for the protection of workers and the environment as well as specific complaint, review and follow-up mechanisms, which we will implement jointly and on an equal footing with our trading partners. Our aim is to ensure that digital rights are enshrined in trade agreements in times of global technological change. At the same time, we believe that sector-specific trade cooperations (such as the US-EU Trade and Technology Council) make sense in order to set global standards and expand strategic partnerships.

Boosting geoeconomic expertise and instruments

We are committed to a European Union that pools its competences in foreign economic policy and protects and defends sovereign European decisions. We want to continuously analyse our economic relations and dependencies, proactively and in great depth, so that we can recognise risks at an early stage. We will also continue to work on a broad range of geo-economic instruments that are necessary to respond to various challenges. The introduction of the trade instrument against economic coercion, spearheaded by Social Democrats, is an important addition to the toolbox. With these instruments we not only want to give the European Union the opportunity to assert itself as a geopolitical player, but also to fully assume and invigorate this function.

Strengthening international trade rules

We favour free, fair and rules-based world trade. We want to reform the dispute settlement system of the World Trade Organisation and include climate and human rights objectives in the rules and standards of international trade. We will advocate an update of the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures to effectively control the intensifying global subsidy race. A crucial step towards regulation of this race is to create a framework that increases transparency with regard to the actual use of subsidies.

6. A refugee policy based on solidarity

People around the world continue to be forced to leave their homes. They are fleeing violence, terror and persecution. The vast majority of them seek protection as internally displaced persons in other parts of their country or in neighbouring countries. For quite a few, however, the European Union is the place to finally find safety and peace because the community of 27 Member States remains a haven of the rule of law and humanity despite many challenges. In this spirit, we want to strengthen the European Union so that, as a strong community, it can provide a humanitarian response to the people who need our protection and refuge.

Safeguarding humanitarian responsibility

With a view on our own history, the right to asylum, as a cornerstone of Social Democratic policy, is firmly anchored in our fundamental values, and is non-negotiable. For us, there is no doubt that those in need of protection should be given refuge. Our migration policy is therefore based on the fundamental principle of humanity. At the same time, in order to obtain approval for an asylum and refugee policy based on the principle of humanity, we also need to ensure order and control in the management of migration. All Member States of the European Union, without exception, must fulfil their obligations under European and international law when it comes to refugee policy. We demand that the responsibility of the European Union is shouldered in solidarity – as defined in the regulations and obligations which have been signed by all Member States.

A Common European Asylum System based on solidarity

It is a positive development that, after years of dispute, the Member States of the European Union and the European Parliament have agreed on a reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). This important ability of the European Union to unite must now prove itself in practice. A common system must no longer exist on paper only, but be adequately supported by all Member States and provide assistance to people seeking protection in practice. For the SPD, the following is unequivocal: The individual human right to asylum and international refugee law are the irrefutable foundation of the Common European Asylum System. This was and is non-negotiable for us. We therefore make it clear that a fair asylum process with high constitutional standards must be guaranteed in border control procedures.

Special protection for underage refugees travelling alone and families

We were able to ensure that minors travelling alone are generally exempt from border procedures. We have also campaigned for this exemption to apply to families with children and other vulnerable groups. Although it has been achieved that during border procedures families with children must be guaranteed child-appropriate accommodation, we still want families with children, as well as other vulnerable groups, to be fundamentally excluded from border procedures. It is therefore good that the European Asylum Agency is obliged to pay particular attention to the reception conditions for these groups. If it becomes apparent that child-appropriate care cannot be guaranteed, immediate action must be taken and families with children must be exempted from border procedures. We demand the same for other vulnerable groups, such as queer asylum seekers.

For us, the examination of individual asylum claims rather than blanket categorisation by country of origin is paramount. We will closely monitor the human rights situation at the EU's external border. We want to prevent serious abuses and the creation of precarious camps so that disasters such as in Moria are not repeated.

Guaranteeing legal protection in border procedures

For us, it remains crucial that the unrestricted and individual right to asylum and humanitarian conditions are safeguarded in border procedures. People seeking protection whose asylum application is being reviewed in an accelerated asylum procedure must therefore regularly be given the opportunity to receive legal advice. The desired acceleration of the asylum process must in no way lead to restrictions on legal protection. We continue to advocate that legal recourse should always have a suspensive effect.

We call for compliance with all humanitarian and constitutional regulations when guaranteeing the EU's external border protections. There can be no doubt: Pushbacks are a blatant violation of international law. Tolerance of pushbacks or even the involvement by Member State authorities or Frontex must not be permitted under any circumstances. Illegal pushbacks must be halted and sanctioned immediately. We therefore expressly support the independent monitoring of all national activities in the context of migration and asylum. The European Border Guard Agency in particular must investigate and, wherever possible, prevent human rights violations from occurring. To ensure that the EU's external borders conform with the law and are secure, a comprehensive review of the systemic and structural problems of the largest EU agency is required.

Solidarity is a duty

The agreed commitment to solidarity on the part of all Member States is a major step with which the European Union as a whole continues to fulfil its humanitarian responsibility. This applies in particular to those Member States such as Germany that have taken in large numbers of people seeking refuge. This duty of solidarity must therefore be enforced by all Member States from now on. In order to support local authorities in particular, we are calling for an additional fund at the European level for the reception of refugees and for the necessary municipal infrastructure.

High standards and regular monitoring of the security conditions in countries of origin

The individual right to asylum means that the grounds for asylum are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. People seeking protection must always have the opportunity to appeal effectively against negative asylum decisions. General assessments of the security situation in the countries of origin, which are taken into account in asylum processes must be regularly reviewed on the basis of reliable criteria based on the rule of law.

More paths for legal labour migration to Europe

Many people who apply for asylum in the European Union have in fact made the journey to work here. It must

be clear that this is the wrong path. At the same time, we need to create more pathways and show how to gain access to the European labour market from third countries. Because in many places in Europe there is an acute shortage of labour, not only just highly qualified labour. We therefore want to expand existing measures (e.g. EU Blue Card) and a rapid harmonisation of national immigration options. The model here could be Germany's Skilled Labour Immigration Act, which is explicitly targets not just highly qualified workers. In addition, a regular work permit issued by a Member State should also extend (after a certain period of time, for example) to the possibility of working in other Member States. We want to facilitate the issuing of EU visas for training or qualification purposes.

Creating safer and legal migration routes

We want to create paths for legal migration for refugees. Here, the targeted admission of people directly from UNHCR reception centres (resettlement), plays an important role. Such programmes are already available on a voluntary basis. We want this easily manageable and controllable measure to be increasingly utilised. At the same time, it is clear that we will defend the individual right to asylum in Europe and reject the outsourcing of the asylum system to non-EU countries. We also need safer routes to prevent deaths, especially in the Mediterranean. Which is why we support humanitarian visas, among other measures. People with a history of persecution should be given a cursory preliminary asylum check at European Union diplomatic missions abroad so that they can avoid undertaking the perilous journey across the Mediterranean.

Combating the causes of displacement

Violent conflict, state repression, discrimination and massive human rights violations, poverty and the effects of climate change are among the most important triggers of refugee flows. Development policies that reduce a country's vulnerability to crises and improve social cohesion therefore make an important contribution to minimising the causes of displacement. Which is why we want Germany to provide more support in stabilising the political and economic situation, rebuilding structures that have been destroyed after conflicts and providing education and employment opportunities.

We want fair international trade, and a monetary and financial system that does not disadvantage the Global South, but rather ensures that value creation is able to grow in the respective countries, thus creating and maintaining the right conditions for a good life locally.

The vast majority of people seek refuge as internally displaced persons or in neighbouring countries in their region. In many cases, these regions are characterised by conflicts and fragile structures. We want the EU to show solidarity with these countries, support them in providing assistance to refugees and to prevent social and economic conflicts with the local population.

We are committed to ensuring that EU funds are used much more where they are effective and where support is urgently needed: in the host countries, for the development of long-term structures, for human rights protection. We are calling for at least half of these funds to be channelled into long-term investments for the protection and care of refugees in host countries and for the expansion of regular migration routes.

Reducing the burden on local authorities

The agreed relaunch of the Common European Asylum System can only succeed if the new rules are comprehensively implemented everywhere. Through the introduction of a European integration and municipal development fund, cities and municipalities that agree to take in refugees should receive financial support for integration costs and an equal amount for municipal development costs. Within this framework, citizens should

have a say in the organisation of the reception of refugees. At the same time, we will harmonise European rules on access to training and work. The same applies to the EU Blue Card programme, but also to simplified rules for longer-term stays in the EU.

IV. A Europe of respect

We desire a European Union that stands together firmly, especially in these challenging times. The basis for this is a Europe of respect. On the basis of our common values of freedom, democracy, peace and justice, we want prosperity for the many, not just for the few. For us, respect means honouring and protecting different ways of life. It doesn't matter what your social or geographical background is, how you live and who you love, whether you are young or old, academic or labourer. Because we respect each and every individual and must ensure equal opportunities, the right to participation, a good education and decent work. These are the foundations for a self-determined life. Respect therefore also means providing good work in combination with the promise of solidarity.

We are Germans with regional roots, but we are also Europeans. Both fill us equally with pride. The European Union is our common ground, which allows us to be different without fear and without unrealistic dreams. With its shared values, the European Union shapes our identity. We are confidently building the future of the European Union on this common identity. In contrast, the right-wing populists' policy of exclusion and marginalisation misuses the enriching diversity of the EU as an enemy. It is disrespectful and misanthropic. We stand firm and united against their negativity with its misleadingly simple, inappropriate answers, but especially its lies and hatred.

It is our shared values that allow all Member States in the European Union to come together as equals irrespective of their size, economic might or indeed military strength. Respect for the individual is the unique historical feature of the European Union. This we wish to strengthen for the benefit and well-being of every EU citizen.

1. Ensuring good work

From our history in the labour movement, it is clear to us that true respect for workers can only arise if they can collectively represent and negotiate their interests on an equal footing. This applies on both a small and large scale. Nevertheless, we as a state have a responsibility for good framework conditions, as well as the basic rules on labour protection and wages. For the SPD, the central prerequisite for shaping a good future for all Europeans is that all the changes that lie ahead of us can only be shaped together with workers and their trade unions. In Germany and Europe this requires robust co-determination, a high level of collective bargaining and active structural and labour market policies that focus on the interests of working people.

Strengthening social rights

We reject precarious work in Europe. We want good work. To this end, we will continue to vigorously promote the European pillars of social rights at both the national and European level. With common minimum standards for labour markets and social policy, the European Union has taken an important step towards harmonising living conditions in Europe. This has also led to improvements in Germany (compliance with collective agreements in public procurement law, minimum wage directive...) which would never have been implemented in the absence of social democracy. We want to continue along this correct, common path. To this end, we will also anchor the criteria for good work even more firmly in European structural policy, in the structural funds and in regional aid. Here we want collective bargaining, health and safety at work and opportunities for training and further education as mandatory components of the rules for awarding public contracts.

Fair pay for all

People who work full-time must be able to live from their pay. The EU Minimum Wage Directive was an important step in this direction. It obliges the Member States to draw up action plans to increase collective bargaining coverage. The aim is for 80 per cent of employees to be covered by collective agreements. Collective wage agreements should be the rule. They ensure better pay and better working conditions. Europe can do more to further strengthen national collective bargaining. To this end, the allocation of EU funds should in future be more closely linked to conditions such as good work and collective agreements. We will therefore further improve the concession and public procurement directives by including a mandatory collective bargaining clause. We are also fighting for a new legal status for European artists and self-employed workers with EU-wide standards for their minimum remuneration, working conditions and social security.

Digital dividend for all

Digital productivity gains must lead to a reduction in working hours for all workers and not to work intensification. Co-determination must also be strengthened in the context of the digital transformation. We aim to involve workers' expertise to a greater extent when it comes to the digitalisation of processes or the use of artificial intelligence. Our goal is to strengthen the autonomy and self-determination of the workforce.

In favour of a European supply chain law

We also aim to contribute to fair working conditions, the protection of human rights, environmental protection and the fight against climate change outside the European Union. The German Supply Chain Act is an important first step, which we will supplement with a strong European supply chain law. We want to prevent products that are manufactured using forced labour or the exploitation of people and nature from entering the European single market. This is why we support a regulation banning products manufactured using forced labour that includes strong powers for the EU Commission.

Good work through strong labour rights

Co-determination is key in strengthening democracy in companies and workplaces. Co-determined companies are more innovative and more successful. We therefore want to strengthen co-determination. An EU framework directive on worker information, consultation and co-determination is intended to consolidate the patchwork of different co-determination rules. Democracy in the workplace must also be strengthened as part of a reform of European company law. If national thresholds for the applicability of co-determination are subsequently exceeded, there must be an obligation to renegotiate. We also want to strengthen European Works Councils (EWCs) as part of the directive. This applies above all to access to justice, the definition of cross-border issues and appropriate sanctions.

Strengthening European social partnership

As in Germany, we want trade unions and employers to actively utilise the opportunity to shape European social and employment policy at the European level. To this end, we will strengthen social dialogue within the framework of the European social model: Joint agreements between the social partners should quickly be translated into binding legislation. Europe needs an economy that serves the people. This is why the fundamental social rights of the European Union must finally take precedence over basic economic freedoms.

For us it is clear that the right to strike must not be undermined. This is part and parcel of a strong internal market.

Good education and training

A good education is a prerequisite for a successful professional life. Good education and training should not depend on a person's background, gender, disability or their parents' financial and social situation. Following on from the European Education Area 2025 initiatives, we are hence committed to a genuine European education revolution. We want to guarantee all children in the EU an inclusive, equal and high-quality primary and secondary education by 2030. At the same time, we are calling for a binding quality framework and adequate funding for the Youth Guarantee, according to which all young people in the EU should be offered a high-quality job, apprenticeship, further education or internship within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed. It is also important to us to ensure that internships are remunerated in order to strengthen the rights of young people. At the same time, we want to facilitate the cross-border placement of traineeships and jobs. We also favour greater, broad-based support for European universities that benefits all students. Our goal remains free education from nursery school through apprenticeships, undergraduate studies to master's degrees. We are striving to achieve this EU-wide. The Bologna reform should create a common European higher education area with comparable degrees and greater student mobility. We are working within the EU to ensure that these aims are implemented consistently. We want to see a significant increase in investment in education and are particularly committed to strengthening the European Solidarity Corps and ERASMUS+. Our aim is to ensure that anyone who wishes to do so can have at least one ERASMUS+-funded learning experience abroad by the age of 25. We also support European and international youth organisations in their political and cultural education work. Transnational projects and encounters, in particular, actively help to break down prejudices and enable young people to experience a Europe that is growing together.

2. Guarantee social security

More than one in five EU citizens is at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Poverty divides the continent and weakens cohesion. Building a European social union is therefore a key concern for us. Social Europe must be strengthened and brought into balance with fundamental economic freedoms. This is why we are in favour of a social progress protocol that is annexed to the European treaties. The European Pillar of Social Rights and the goals defined at the Social Summit in Porto in 2021 will continue to guide our actions in the next legislative period. Strong social security systems support people in times of change and enable them to live in dignity. We want to create the right framework conditions for this to become a reality.

Common standards for basic social security systems

We will strive to ensure that all Member States of the European Union have solid social security networks in place. Therefore, we favour a framework directive to define minimum standards for the various national basic social security systems. Minimum social security benefits must guarantee adequate, poverty-proof income support as well as support services for (re-)integration into the labour market. This is how we will create the conditions for reducing involuntary and poverty-related migration within the European Union.

Protection from child poverty

Special efforts are also needed to protect children and young people affected by poverty if we want to achieve the goal agreed in Porto: to lift five million children out of poverty in the EU by 2030. We will therefore effectively support the national implementation of the European Child Guarantee and provide sufficient EU funding within the framework of the European Social Fund. In addition, the social funds must be better financed in the coming funding period. This will also benefit our Social Democratic concept of a basic child guarantee especially for the expansion of the infrastructure for education and participation.

Introduction of a European disability card

The new strategy for people with disabilities aims to guarantee equal opportunities and equal access to participation in social and economic life. We favour a European disability card and improvement of the European parking card for people with disabilities with the aim of removing barriers to participation and ensuring compensation for disadvantages in the areas of mobility, culture, leisure and sport. In this way, the rights of people with disabilities will be boosted in all European Member States.

Affordable housing, especially in cities

Our goal is to ensure universal access to good, fully barrier-free and affordable housing. We want to create liveable urban centres with a sufficient supply of affordable, long-term rental flats. In doing so, we will counter increasing shortages and the resulting steep rise in rental prices. The EU must provide greater support for investment in affordable, social and energy-efficient housing and give Member States sufficient room for manoeuvre to make the necessary investments in social housing. We also need more European flexibility in the granting of state housing subsidies. In addition, we want to further strengthen European exchange between national players in the sector. Rental flats, not holiday flats, must be the norm in cities. We therefore support local authorities that restrict the conversion of rented apartments into holiday homes and are committed to giving cities with tight housing markets the option of limiting short-term rentals. European legislation is needed to put a stop to the worst excesses of conversions and to protect tenants in tight housing markets. We will also keep an eye on the growing market for furnished rental flats in order to prevent regulations for affordable housing from being undermined by this trend. We want to expand the opportunities to use EU funds to promote the creation of affordable housing, especially for young people.

Overcoming homelessness in Germany and Europe

It is our goal to end homelessness in Germany and Europe by 2030. That is why we support the European Platform to Combat Homelessness. We are convinced that the solution to the often complex problems of homeless people must start with a home of their own. We support this Housing First approach and want to expand it further. In addition, the SPD is committed to making sure the issue receives even more attention in the new Commission.

3. Access to good healthcare

Everyone in Europe should have access to essential medicines and the latest therapies at affordable prices. The coronavirus pandemic showed how important a coordinated approach among the Member States can be. We therefore are calling for Europe-wide networked and patient-centred healthcare, prevention and care. To achieve this, we need a strong European Health Union. Together, we can combat supply bottlenecks, ensure fair prices for medicines and strengthen the care sector.

Preventive measures to combat supply bottlenecks

In the long term, we aim to combat supply bottlenecks, especially for critical active ingredients or vaccines. To this end, we are in favour of further developing preventative mechanisms such as monitoring, shortage management plans and reporting obligations as part of EU pharmaceutical legislation. We advocate a European instrument for monitoring and recognising shortages of medicinal products and increasing transparency in the supply and authenticity of medicines.

Fair prices for medicines

We want more joint European procurement of medicines to achieve the best value for money. Ensuring access to medical innovations for all EU citizens also requires a fair, Europe-wide system of pharmaceutical pricing and benefit assessment. We favour a solidarity-based system that is geared towards political, market and economic conditions and the purchasing power of the European partner countries and, where applicable, other buyer countries.

Good and safe care at home and on the move

Cross-border treatment of patients in the European Union requires the introduction of Europe-wide interoperability of healthcare data with secure and uniform standards. In doing so, we will ensure that patients always retain control over their health data. In the future, we want to further facilitate access to treatment and the free choice of physicians for short-term stays in other EU countries, whether as tourists or seasonal workers, and make more effective use of simple and fast digital billing for treatment in other EU countries.

Further improvements in the care sector

With the European Care Strategy, we have focussed on the topics of care and support and considered them together. We now wish to implement the strategy consistently, in particular through more investment in the care sector and the introduction of binding European regulations. To this end, we want to transform informal work into formalised work, ensure regular and good working conditions while combatting precarious working conditions, particularly for women employed by private households.

Creating more incentives for innovation and stepping up the fight against antibiotic resistance

We want to create new incentives for research and development on urgently needed novel antibiotics. At the same time, we want stronger supervision of antibiotic use in order to respond to the increasing international health threat posed by growing resistance. With this in mind, we will advocate for the full implementation of the European One Health Action Plan against antimicrobial resistance and increased cooperation with our international partners with the aim of achieving a global agreement on the use of and access to antimicrobials. We will also work to ensure that the chronic consequences of infections are prioritised, for example, for people suffering from Long Covid, Post Vac and ME/CFS, who urgently need access to approved medicines and deserve our solidarity. As part of the European research programme, we will continue to advocate for the advancement of gender-specific medical research and the expansion of therapy development in the field of autoimmune diseases.

4. Guaranteeing a society free of discrimination

A Europe of respect is a Europe free of discrimination, because discrimination-free societies are happier, healthier, more resilient, more prosperous, safer and, above all, fairer. Nevertheless, in some Member States, we are increasingly seeing attempts to undermine the rights of women, people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ people. Group-focused misanthropy, homophobia, racism and anti-semitism are poison for a good, peaceful coexistence. These misanthropic and anti-democratic tendencies can be observed within the EU and worldwide. We will not accept and allow conservative and right-wing governments to call into question and attack the rights we have fought for. Women's rights, the rights of people of colour as well as the rights of people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ people are human rights. We have achieved a lot in Germany and Europe in recent years and decades – but by no means everything that should be achieved.

EU charter of women's rights

We call for an EU Charter of Women's Rights. We need a catalogue of fundamental rights to be protected, absolute minimum standards, such as universal access to contraception, sexual and reproductive healthcare and rights, including reproductive self-determination and safe and legal abortions as well as sex and relationship education. We are working to ensure free, low-threshold access to abortion drugs such as the "morning-after pill" over the long term. Safe abortions should also be available free of charge to as many people as possible in the EU to ensure reproductive self-determination and health. The aim must be to protect, expand and enshrine rights. The right to safe and legal abortion should be enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Renewing European equality strategies

The European gender equality strategy must continue to be implemented effectively, particularly in the form of qualitative and quantitative measures that strengthen women's labour market participation. The first-ever LG-BTIQ+ equality strategy (for 2020 to 2025), must be consistently implemented and continually improved. Both strategies should take stock of previous experiences, be given their own budgets, and be renewed for the period 2025 to 2030.

Economic independence for women creates social justice

To strengthen women's economic independence, we want to close the gender gap in employment, pay and social security. Above all, we need quality jobs and fair wages and pensions. We are proud that we were able to push through the European directive on pay transparency, enabling more women to receive fair pay for their work. However, there is still a need for implementation, especially when it comes to the German Pay Transparency Act. To close the gender pay gap, we are campaigning not only for the implementation of the pay transparency directive, but also for an EU directive on anti-discrimination in wages. Because one thing is clear to us: Pay transparency alone does not fulfil our Social Democratic aspirations. We demand equal pay for equal work within a single geographical location in the EU. The adopted minimum wage directive will also ensure that women in particular, who often work in the low-wage sector, are better protected from poverty. We also want to close the gender gap in the care sector. Care work is still performed primarily by women. This should not remain so. We are therefore striving for the "equal carer - equal earner" model, i.e. a gender equality-orientated employment and care model.

More women in management positions

We will empower women in the economy, especially as founders of companies and start-ups. We will ensure that women are more fairly represented in decision-making processes in politics and in companies. Quotas and zipper systems, but also a more gender-sensitive political culture and corporate culture are measures that should be supported. The EU Leadership Positions Directive (2022) is a milestone for gender equality in Europe. It strengthens women on supervisory boards and paves the way for them to enter the executive floors of listed companies. As a next step, we plan to look at the boards of all companies based in the European Union.

Fiscal equality

Women have different consumption patterns and have lower incomes but bear a higher VAT burden. We are committed to ensuring that the tax burden is finally distributed more fairly. This ranges from reduced tax rates in the EU on feminine hygiene products to ending the practice of putting higher prices on products and services that target women (pink tax). In other words, we will ensure that equivalent products and services cost the same for men and women.

Fighting and preventing violence against women together

To end male violence against women, we must address, analyse and break down harmful norms, structures and stereotypes, promote sex education in schools and work for Europe-wide violence-prevention through gender-sensitive educational programmes for boys and girls. Only a rethink of society as a whole and the establishment of modern role models will promote the equal perception of women in all areas of society and thus put an end to violence.

The adoption of the Istanbul Convention is a strong signal from the EU that common values are non-negotiable, including women's rights. It must be a matter of course in all EU Member States to take consistent action against gender-based violence. The Istanbul Convention must therefore be ratified in all EU Member States and the legislation must be transposed into national law.

The directive on combating gender-based violence is also an important step towards establishing minimum, Europe-wide standards for the protection of women. We want to go further and are campaigning for gender-based violence to be recognised as a Europe-wide criminal offence in order to be able to combat all forms of violence against women even more comprehensively in future.

Combat human trafficking and exploitation

We want to continue Europe's common fight against human trafficking and update existing legislation to tackle the latest challenges in this area. One of the main objectives must be to protect women trafficked into and within the EU for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Gender equality and parity in European institutions

We are striving for gender parity in the new EU Commission and will ensure that once again a Commissioner is explicitly responsible for the issue of equality – equality between women and men, anti-discrimination and LGBTIQ+ rights. We are also committed to further strengthening the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The EU budget should be gender-responsive using the gender budgeting instrument.

Protecting the rights of queer people

The European Union guarantees the freedom of queer people, as expressly decided by the European Parliament, with the support of Social Democrats. The declaration of and support for the "LGBTIQ+ Freedom Zone" grew out of the concern that steps taken to protect the freedom of queer people are acutely jeopardised. We will stand resolutely against each and every type of discrimination and hostility. We call on the EU Commission, as guardian of the treaties, to react harshly to LGBTIQ+-hostile actions by individual Member States. This behaviour is incompatible with the values of the European Union and must be stopped. We also demand that European rainbow families are unhindered in their freedom of movement and that registered partnerships and same-sex marriages are recognised throughout the EU.

Protecting national minorities

In accordance with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, we are committed to protecting national minorities in Germany and Europe and support measures to preserve their cultural heritage.

An age-just Europe

Active and healthy ageing has a positive impact on society, the labour market, social systems and productivity.

We are therefore campaigning against age discrimination and want to help people to lead their lives independently for as long as possible and to participate in society.

5. Protect security and freedom

Respect also means living without fear of crime and being allowed to be different without fear. All Europeans should feel safe in the EU and have the freedom to inform themselves independently and form their own opinions. To this end, we will protect the independence of the media and take more effective action against disinformation. Crime often takes place across borders, which is why our national police and security authorities must cooperate even better. We aim to set rules at the European level to strengthen European consumer protection in the single market. In view of the rise of climate change-related disasters, in addition to other kinds of emergencies, we wish to improve civil protection by working even more closely with our European partners and, where appropriate, manage it centrally.

Ensure freedom of the media

Media freedom is an essential part of the fundamental rights of European citizens. We have seen in recent years how pressure has been exerted on the media in Europe and how European values have been violated. It is therefore high time to strengthen the independence of the media in all Member States and to curb state influence where it is abused. Governments must not be allowed to influence the reporting work of public and private media or exert pressure on journalists. To this end, we are further developing common instruments to protect the independence of the media and ensuring that non-governmental and civil society organisations receive direct support wherever democracy and the rule of law are under particular pressure. To this end, we strive to establish a special fund for democracy and the rule of law.

Strengthening international cooperation between security authorities

We want to bolster cross-border cooperation between police forces and security agencies in the European Union. This includes, in particular, strengthening Europol in its support of the Member States. This cooperation should focus primarily on combating economic crime and cybercrime. It should also focus on the trafficking of weapons, drugs and human beings, with a priority placed on combating sexualised violence against children and women. It also remains the case that we can only counter violent extremist or terrorist acts together as a European Union. To further improve our cross-border collaboration, we favour continuous law enforcement education and training with common standards, for example, with the help of the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Education and Training. We intend to strengthen judicial cooperation at the EU level. This applies to the European Union Agency for Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters (Eurojust), as well as shared European channels for the secure exchange of data. Further attention will be paid to combating money laundering with the planned anti-money laundering agency AMLA, which we favour basing in Frankfurt.

Strengthening the European Public Prosecutor's Office

The European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) is an important body in the fight against (tax) fraud, corruption and money laundering. We are endeavouring to ensure that, in addition to the current 22 Member States, all EU states quickly join the office. We want to further strengthen the work of the EPPO by providing sufficient financial and human resources for it to carry out its work. We want to ensure better coordination between national law enforcement authorities, including cooperation with European agencies such as Europol, Eurojust and the EPPO.

Facilitating the seizure of assets

The war in Ukraine has made it clear that increased European cooperation is essential when it comes to the investigation of war crimes, the prosecution of violations of EU sanctions or the confiscation and freezing of assets belonging to oligarchs or members of crime organisations.

Expanding European civil protection and strengthening crisis competences

In the face of multiple crises and major disasters, we favour a European resilience strategy. This should encompass various types of challenges, including natural disasters, terrorist attacks, pandemics and other emergencies. We want to further strengthen the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) and better link it to the civil protection structures of the Member States. There must be no bottlenecks in the European Union when it comes to the supply of critical goods. With regards to exercising emergency powers, the Commission must be subject to genuine parliamentary scrutiny. The Commission must not exercise its emergency powers without the active consent of the Parliament.

Strengthening European consumer protection

The abolition of roaming charges, the introduction of standardised charging cables and high standards for consumer and environmental protection are just a few examples that reflect the power of 450 million consumers in Europe. As citizens, we must be able to make informed decisions to actively contribute to the fight against climate change and ensure fair coexistence in society. This is why we want to limit the opportunities for manipulation on the internet which are all too often used to trick consumers into making decisions that they subsequently regret (dark patterns). Investment decisions are also often misguided by false incentives from intermediaries. We therefore support a ban on commission fees on the brokerage of financial services.

The empowerment of consumers requires effective market supervisory authorities and a competition watchdog that puts consumer protection first. Consumers must not be made solely responsible for the enforcement of market rules. This is why online marketplaces in particular must be made more accountable, should be subjected to oversight obligations and be held liable for negligence. We want to prohibit dynamic pricing by monopoly companies as an unfair business practice.

Decriminalisation of cannabis

We are convinced that a licensed and controlled supply of cannabis will help curb the illegal drug trade and minimise health risks. We are committed to the responsible, swift legalisation of cannabis in accordance with European law and want to create the legal conditions for doing so. The protection of health and young people is our top priority.

V. Conclusion

In a time when Europe is once again threatened by nationalists and right-wing populists, in a time of war on the European continent, in the face of social and economic disparities and increasingly noticeable climate change, new impetus is needed to strengthen the cohesion of the European Union. As Social Democrats, we are united in the certainty that only together can we Europeans create a better future. In recent years, we have clearly shown that we Europeans are capable of doing so. But there is still a lot of room for betterment.

For us, there is no either-or. The necessary reorganisation of our economy, good future-proof jobs, climate protection and providing support for the many – the SPD brings all of these together. With us, progress remains fair.

Our Europe is socially and ecologically sustainable. Our Europe is fair, also with regard to its impact on the rest of the world. Our Europe is strong and capable of action. Our Europe stands for a better future and for our common security in all areas of life. Our Europe is a strong Europe because it sticks together and improves people's lives.