

THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY A COMPASS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

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We live in a time of global crises. A long-term economic crisis is leading many to question globalisation. The ecological crisis is threatening what makes our world habitable. The inability to act effectively in the face of these challenges is giving rise to a deep political crisis: in a context of reservations towards their representatives, European societies seem to be breaking down into divided communities, which makes the possibility of democratic dialogue harder. The recent wave of terrorist attacks in our countries confirms the timeliness of the threat.

At this moment in history, Europe is at a crossroads. Over the last decades, people were raised out of poverty; instances of war, famine and disease decreased. Our continent has built new paths to get to its present shape, which without being perfect is a model well regarded across the world. Nowadays these progresses are challenged; it is our responsibility and our duty to safeguard the achievements of the past. The European Union remains the world's second largest economic power, but we face strong competition from other global powers, both in terms of economic influence and challenges to our political system and, in some cases, to our very values and principles. China, for example, with the Silk Road project, expresses a new economic and geopolitical ambition. To add to these emergences, the pandemic that marked the year 2020 has revealed Europe's industrial and technological dependence in many strategic areas. Interdependencies are no longer seen only as a source of security, but also as a source of insecurity. Certainly, Europe is still the continent with the highest development indicators in the world, but it is struggling to find its place in the face of the major powers whose rising influence defies multilateralism; and our democracies, the heirs of twenty-five centuries of history, are challenged in their ability to control their destiny.

These questions urge Christian Democracy, the

political force that has been the main engine of European integration in recent decades, to reinforce and get back to driving meaningful change. To raise a new hope, we stick to our Christian Democratic heritage, especially to the Catholic and Protestant social teaching time-tested for two thousand years, based on stewardship, personalism, subsidiarity, responsibility and solidarity. We see ourselves as grateful heirs to those who have preceded us and, strengthened by this heritage, we look to the future without being locked in the past.

We, as the EPP Group, believe our values are still the strongest starting point for designing the future, because they combine the best of conservative, liberal and Christian-social ways of thinking and they bring all of them together in a shared view of the world. Through these values, centre-right acquires meaning that goes beyond daily politics. Religion inspires our action, but does not constrain it: Christian Democracy is not about religion, but about a precise political approach based on the fundamental values of the dignity of every person - and tolerance - and defining political vocation as a service to humanity. This means that Christian Democracy embraces all Christians, believers of any other religion as well as non-believers. Christian Democracy is more than a label; it is our compass to navigate the world. We need to re-learn to speak up for the core identity of the EPP Group.

But we have to translate our values in the present. Setting new goals and tasks for Christian Democracy is, therefore, necessary not only for the future of the centre-right, but for the future of Europe: in this period of global crises, the first political responsibility is to preserve and pass on to future generations our most precious heritage. Pass on a nature whose ecological instability today threatens vital equilibria. Pass on our rich cultural heritage made more fragile by new divides in European societies. Finally,

pass on the very possibility of common action through politics and democratic institutions. Europe has gone through stages of foundation and conservation. At today's critical point, our political family's mission is to save what must be saved, so as to chart an ambitious path towards a bright future.

1. Safeguarding nature

It is our duty to have a clear vision of ecology: man does not own nature, he inherits it, he must pass on its miracles to the next generations and strive to leave a world where life remains possible. Man is part of nature, he relies on it and should behave accordingly. By forgetting this, we have caused dangerous imbalances for the future. Nevertheless, we will not be able to repair the damage by choosing to disappear. We need to promote the place of human beings as stewards for this world. Responsibility towards nature does not imply for man to deny his role, to cease to act or to try erase himself, but to show responsibility for a more humane world and find sustainability through reason. We must base our decisions on facts and science rather than rely on superficial ideology and deprived of substance. Only working in sobriety and thinking long-term will allow us to restore the climate balance, to protect biodiversity, to promote animal welfare, to care for landscapes and to transmit the beauty of the world. People everywhere understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have done in the past. We have to find the timelines for the transformation of the economy, and we must be united on this: in this area too, we need to have confidence in the European spirit and its capacity for creation to face the ecological challenge.

Our responsibility towards ensuring a vibrant nature does not stop at protecting the environment. We are also the guardians of the human condition itself, bound by the absolute requirement of the dignity of the human person, the constitutive features of his or her nature, freedom of conscience and respect for fundamental rights. All persons have their own self-worth, independently of their use for humankind. It is our duty to preserve a world in which a truly human life remains possible, by protecting the world of relations that constitute the very foundation of our lives: the mutual trust between people, the sense of belonging to particular communities, family in the first

place, and the political community, which binds individuals by the awareness of the common good. They are the structures through which each person can be formed and fulfilled, can develop reason and intelligence, learn to live with others, and support genuine freedom shaped by responsibility. There is no policy that lays the groundwork for the future without supporting families, the foundation of any society and the condition of its future vitality. For this reason, we know the demographic issue in Europe cannot be ignored: brain drain – especially from North to South and from East to West – and low birth rates and ageing societies have a disproportionate impact on different groups, generations and regions. This negative demographic spiral affects the economy – creating significant labour shortages – and also affects our youth and social systems. This is a threat to the future of our countries. Therefore, we should add a demographic pillar to our decisions in all political fields. We not only want to keep families together, but also to create the conditions for families well-being by reconciling work and family life balance and supporting a society open to children.

Furthermore, after the wake-up call of the Coronavirus pandemic, the question of health becomes increasingly important to society: we, as Christian Democrats, always strive for balancing the protection and freedom of the person – physical, mental and social – that are at the centre of our actions. We believe in a society that helps those in need. In medical research, the usual commercial logic needs to be guided by the general interest of the common good, because it falls within the sphere of the necessary. To achieve it, we stand for international scientific cooperation, so that Europe can contribute to and benefit from medical progress.

Diseases have no borders. That is why health is a common challenge. We must increase Europe's resilience and independence in medical supplies and active pharmaceutical ingredients, invest in common research projects, ensure adequate access to medical services for all citizens, strengthen European cross-border and regional cooperation in the healthcare area and build technologies serving better care, while determining high standards to protect patients' rights. Ensuring the resilience of basic infrastructure to external shocks is of paramount importance for providing the continued and safe provision of essential health services. In this respect, we have already taken a clear stand on

harnessing the innovative European potential in the fight against cancer. We must now work towards a future-proof European health policy, prepared for the next crisis, and helping our citizens through healthy ageing.

2. Safeguarding the conditions for future prosperity

In the globalised world of the twenty-first century, our responsibility is to define the role of the Social Market economy in the economies of Europe and beyond. The free movement of goods, capital, services and persons, as well as competition itself, must be accompanied by the fulfilment of human dignity. Ensuring stability in our societies means setting the conditions for shared prosperity in a sustainable way. This can only be achieved through the merit of decent work, whose dignity and essential role in the economy and society are recognised by Christian Democracy. Work produces goods or services necessary for life or for the improvement of living conditions; through its collective effort, it also creates essential relationships between people. We reject any conception that would only see work as a power struggle, related to pressure and oppression, a zero-sum game where the gain of one implies the loss of the other. We believe work allows any society to create, together, much more than the sum of individual efforts. It implies that Europe must act to ensure respect for work and fair pay; salaries have to allow people to have a decent life. It also implies entrepreneurial freedom and a level playing field in trade, in the Single Market and in its international commercial relations. The economy is at the service of men, and not the other way around.

We know that working is much more than just getting a salary: it gives people purpose, meaning and freedom, but also interaction with fellow human beings and creativity. We firmly believe that work is the means by which man realises his personality and expresses his personal qualities and inclinations. It gives people the possibility to participate in building something more than their own lives. That is why we affirm that creating jobs and learning opportunities and entrepreneurship is a much better policy than providing handouts to reduce youth unemployment, in particular. The objective of a high-level of employment must be taken into account in defining and implementing

European policies and activities. Similarly, we firmly believe in the value of private property insofar as it guarantees freedom while inspiring a sense of responsibility. We acknowledge the value of voluntary work that benefits our society in many ways and supports people in need.

No society is prosperous, fair and united without work. This also means that our developed countries cannot treat it as a mere cost factor, or try to dispose of it, particularly by delegating to less well-off peoples the task of producing for us. The Social Market economy is based on the mutual benefit of economic exchanges, on the condition that everyone brings the product of their labour to the market.

In this perspective, trade is a source of prosperity and mutual benefits. As long as human rights, the rule of law and common rules are applied, while taking into account environmental and social responsibility, balanced trade policy can be a way to bring the products of European labour and knowhow to foreign markets, driving technological innovation, consumer choice and lower prices, while strengthening our geopolitical position in the world and building bridges towards other continents and cultures. It has, however, to take into account not only the consumer, but also the producer: the European Union has to secure a real level playing field in its trade relations, to avoid economic and social distortions, by demanding concrete reciprocity to all countries willing to enter its Single Market. We must ensure that trade does not lead to the exploitation of injustices or the deterioration of living standards, nor cause unilateral dependency: therefore, safeguards have to be in place in order to balance the individual needs of consumers with the common good of our societies. We need to become more firm in this regard: Europe must give itself the means to recover its capacity to work, provide, nourish and produce domestically through its traditional agricultural and food sectors and its industries, as well as to further develop its energy, critical raw materials, processing and component production capabilities and services sectors. This is not only an economic, but also an ecological and geopolitical challenge.

For our countries to be able to take a strong place in a world of competing powers, including in world trade, Europe must ensure its food security and open strategic autonomy, in particular through a sustained research effort; for example,

in digital and new technologies. While supporting a rules-based multilateral order for the purpose of promoting fair international trade competition, it must also be prepared to actively defend its interests and values through bilateral agreements and autonomous instruments. We must remain open to the world, but not allow authoritarian regimes to exploit our Single Market or steal intellectual property from our companies and thus endanger our democracies through cyberattacks and malign influence.

Digitalisation is already transforming the way in which we communicate, work and live. In the new digital era, Europe will only ensure real future prosperity if it convincingly invests in research and innovation and provides the proper environment for the deployment of physical and digital infrastructures. For us, as Christian Democrats, it is the search for common good, rather than money, power or ideology, which should always drive our choices when it comes to innovation. The person must be at the centre: we want to shape the digital revolution according to our common values and ethics. To us, innovation is not a goal in itself; it is a means to improve people's lives. We want to create conditions that enable the human being to be in control of future technologies, especially through education. As this is not the case in all parts of the world. We need to define a regulatory approach for Artificial Intelligence and Big Data in the medium and long-term, based on the promotion of human dignity against transhumanist and eugenicist ideologies, or the commodification of the human body.

At the same time, we must be vigilant and avoid the same political and social disruption created by the first Industrial Revolution. Despite great benefits, it also created great divisions between winners and losers in society. Unlike in the past, we want to employ technological advances purposefully to create millions of new jobs and support citizens in this digital transition. No one should be left behind in this revolution, and this will require an important upskilling effort through education, also responding to the green transition and technological advancements. Europe must also continue discussing with other states and organisations, in particular like-minded ones, in order to find broader solutions to common problems such as digital trade, data flows and taxation.

3. Safeguarding culture and the European way of life

By doing so, Europe will be able to pass on to the Europeans of tomorrow the ability to act for the good of mankind, for social and economic progress, based on the principles that bind us together. Because Europe is not a neutral space, neither simply a single market, or an international organisation like any other: it is founded on a civilisation, born from the encounter of the Greco-Latin heritage with Jewish and Christian pillars, following its path through the medieval era, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The idea of Europe designates a geographical and spiritual space, dating back several millennia. All together, we are citizens of Europe and thus we have to cultivate in our heritage a common European identity along with our national ones.

Today's Europe will be better prepared for future tasks if it does recognise and value, name and transmit these intellectual and spiritual roots, which for centuries have nourished our plurality of cultures. In their diversity, our countries are united by these common origins, through a certain way of life, a conception of the person and society and its translation into law, architecture and urbanism, languages and the arts. If European history has often been tragically unfaithful to this heritage, it has seen our common civilisation mature, even through our mistakes. It is now more necessary than ever to preserve and pass on what we receive from it for the future: the principle of the inalienable dignity of every person, and solidarity with special attention to the most vulnerable; the unconditional protection of freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression; the sense of responsibility and the pursuit of the common good; a taste for conversation, the art of civility, an approach of reason and moderation; a concern for justice, and a willingness to put the use of force to the service of the law; equality before the law, and in particular the equality of men and women. The political tradition of Christian Democracy, particularly linked to the heritage of European civilisation, has these values at its core.

Ultimately, Europe can offer the world of tomorrow the loyalty it owes to these essential principles of the European way of life. To do so, it must first of all re-commit itself to passing on its heritage to future generations, through the primordial role of education, so that it may increase their freedom and, at

the same time, raise their awareness of what we have in common. The duty to remember and the learnings of history do not imply perpetual guilt, or the denial of the roots that make us what we are: refusing our roots can only isolate us in individualism, loss of meaning, communitarian conflicts, thus giving space to ideologies such as radical Islamism. Getting to know and appreciate the unique civilisation we receive from our elders is all the more necessary to enable identification and a sense of belonging. For young immigrants, getting to know and appreciate our civilisation and European way of life is important so as to share common references and feel integrated in the society that we are living in together and which they are part of. Although the responsibility for integration lies mainly with the Member States, the European Union supports national authorities.

Successful integration is necessary so that the civic bond can last. Admitting people in without really being able to offer them a place in our society is not benevolent. It quickly leads to exploitation and poor working conditions for migrant workers or to integration problems, also in successive generations. That is why integration should always be a priority, as a mutual task for both the society and the newcomer. It requires civic education, learning the language, finding work and accepting the norms and values of our society. On the other hand, anyone who fully chooses to engage in our society must also experience that he belongs and that he has a future here as a fully-fledged citizen.

Human beings are not indistinguishable atoms developing in a neutral space: sharing these common references is the precondition of a peaceful life in society. This means that, without losing a humanitarian perspective, it is necessary to guarantee a stricter control of borders and the control of migratory flows, without which any society might be destabilised. Every person aspires to live in a world with a familiar culture, language and lifestyle: no migration policy can rule out this need while considering economic calculations only, justifying our impotence, or encouraging circulation. The primary right is not to be welcomed into someone else's home, but it is to be able to live in one's own home.

To make it fully efficient, Europe must commit itself more effectively to enhancing cooperation with countries of origin, supporting the development and regional integration of Africa and the still developing and economically emerging countries of

the world. Restoring this balance is essential because we want to preserve the right of asylum, which is part of our civilisation: this duty of humanity implies welcoming with dignity those who are genuinely threatened or persecuted, not allowing uncontrolled migratory flows to take place for the benefit of human trafficking networks. Guaranteeing that only those who are legally authorised to do so enter Europe is a condition for the unity of our societies as well as for the security of people beyond our borders, on land and at sea. Illegal crossings lead to real human tragedies. More than twenty thousand migrants have died in the Mediterranean since the wave of migration broke out in 2014. This crisis has created serious difficulties in ensuring effective control at the external border in accordance with the Schengen acquis, as well as in receiving and managing migrants on arrival. It also highlighted wider structural shortcomings in the way the Union's external borders are protected.

4. Safeguarding politics

Passing on the practice of democracy and of participation in a common civilisation is necessary so that politics, the very fact of deliberating and acting together, can remain possible. This presupposes an awareness of what binds us together: a society is not a sum of individuals doomed to solitude, nor is it a battlefield between distinct groups, each defending their own interests or identities. The nature and culture we share together, security and prosperity and peace and justice, constitute the foundations of a common good to which no one can be indifferent, and which is a duty for everyone to uphold. Raising awareness of this common outlook is all the more necessary at a time when social, geographical and communitarian divides are weakening the unity of European societies.

The atomisation of society contributes to dissolving the civic bond: the very possibility of politics is at stake, without which only violence can prevail. Reclaiming the meaning of politics implies to reaffirm that it cannot be dissociated from the moral requirement of serving the common good. It is a reminder that both citizens' duties as much as elected representatives' responsibilities imply a concern for truth and require knowledge. It means refusing to allow public debate to be confiscated by anathema and excess, public action to be diluted in electoral tactics, disinformation and permanent communication, and

fighting against this drift, in particular by promoting freedom of media. This is the true meaning of democratic pluralism. Political loyalty implies remaining self-critical: we have to submit our daily practice to our Christian Democratic principles. This ethical priority is the condition to restore the trust of citizens. It is a true urgency as this distrust in democratic institutions is one of the crucial problems of our time: growing complexity in our societies is one of the reasons, but neither should we be blind to the forces that attack the basis of democracy.

Christian Democracy has a role in reconciliation: we have to bridge the greatest gaps running through Europe.

Reclaiming the meaning of politics also entails unconditionally respecting the rule of law and rejecting the power of arbitrariness. The European Union needs to establish clear, just and unbiased criteria defining the rule of law that cannot be misused by ideological fights for its future character. The values of the rule of law and an independent judiciary are key to preserving social order. These values represent the political criteria that countries wishing to join the European Union must meet. They need to be consistently and objectively monitored in each Member State. Furthermore, the rule of law is also protected through a vibrant society. We must promote a resilient community by supporting genuine grassroots civil society. In times of crisis especially, a vibrant society is the best way to hold people together.

Finally, reclaiming the meaning of politics means restoring democracy to its essence: born in Europe twenty-five centuries ago, this political system means people have the power to govern themselves through their decisions, matured in civic conversation. While this aspiration to freedom triumphed over Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism during the twentieth century, the democratic experience seems once again to be at stake because of the emergence of new forms of alienation, the side effects of the unprecedented spread of lies allowed by new technologies, the rise of globalisation and the development of non-political authorities that do not assume responsibility before the people. In this context, many citizens in Europe feel that they can no longer decide, nor have a meaningful contribution to the democratic process, and that they are losing control of their destiny.

The European Union should not be among the institutions blamed for this feeling of dispossession: it must stick to the principle of subsidiarity on which it is based and

which is defined in the Treaties, so that every decision is taken at the closest relevant level to the citizens, only in cases of shared competencies at the European scale “if the proposed action cannot sufficiently be achieved by the Member States”¹. Subsidiarity should help bridging the gap between the European project and the reality on the ground. Therefore, topics related to national competences, not explicitly attributed to the Union under the Treaties (principle of conferral), shall be respected and not transformed into European policy issues, while the European Union has to get clear powers to act efficiently where we have to show common strength. The virtue and power of solidarity and subsidiarity also demand loyalty and fulfilment of each member’s duties.

Because European legislation has a real impact on people’s lives, we need a Europe truthful to democracy. This is why citizens must have a say on decisions at the European level, or else democracy within Member States themselves will be compromised. Because it has given birth to a plurality of languages, cultures and peoples, Europe has to remain truthful to a specific political scheme. Europe’s unique model is that of a union of democratic nations born from a common civilisation. The European project can restore citizens’ full sovereignty, through an effective alliance and common strategies that will enable our countries to meet the global challenges we face together. It is on this basis that we will be able to overcome the crises we are going through, and to pass on to future generations the possibility of perpetuating the democratic miracle.

Today we need this approach to lead the European Union against the many threats we face. Our European convictions stem from the awareness that only through a firm European spirit and action will we be able to shape the complex times ahead of us and emerge stronger. We believe that our democratic societies are resilient enough to overcome the global crises of our time. The hope for a better future is the Christian Democratic answer to fear. Christian Democracy is not just an empty word of the past: it is filled with time-tested values as well as an ambitious vision for the future of the European Union and its peoples. It is the best compass to lead Europeans in the years to come. For these reasons, we firmly believe that the future of Europe is strictly linked with the future of Christian Democracy.

¹ Art. 5.3 TEU