European Movement International

BUDAPEST DECLARATION

FOR A STRONGER EUROPE

The European Union (EU) finds itself at a critical juncture, confronting challenges, such as Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, the climate crisis, threats to our fundamental rights and our democracy, geopolitical tensions, security concerns and intensifying global economic competition. Donald Trump's second term as US President, paired with Putin's brutal regime in Russia, adds to the complexity of these challenges.

In view of the above, the EU must pursue European solutions, putting citizens and European civil society at the centre of the decision-making process. We cannot continue to sit on our hands and remain passive. We did it in 2016 with Brexit and the first Trump presidency, we can no longer afford to repeat the same mistakes.

To this end, we have put forward the following recommendations for the new EU leadership for the next 5 years:

Defend our democracy and rights:

- Protect human rights for all and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in society;
- Increase the promotion and enhancement of culture and cultural heritage, fostering a sense of belonging and of togetherness in Europe;
- Defend and restore the rule of law and rigorously enforce the Article 7 mechanism;
- Strengthen media freedom and pluralism all over the EU by closely monitoring the implementation of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA);
- Increase funding for civil society organisations (CSOs) and grant civil society a stronger role in policy-making as per Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU);
- Make European citizens' panels, as well as permanent citizens' conferences, a constant feature of EU policy-making to ensure that citizens' voices are heard and effectively fed into policy-making;
- Develop strong regulations that guarantee and protect citizens' digital rights, especially the right to privacy, data protection, freedom of expression, social rights, and non-discrimination;
- Revise current migration and asylum policies to achieve a comprehensive, humane and common approach to migration and asylum, with binding burden-sharing mechanisms.

Defence and security:

- Make proposals for meaningful political integration with shared strategic objectives and efficient decision-making among Member States to create and implement the European Defence Union (EDU);
- Leverage public and private resources in a Common Market for Security and Defence to drive EU industrial transformation, job creation, and enhanced security capabilities;
- Strengthen the EU's external borders to protect it from military and hybrid threats by creating a fully integrated, coordinated and accountable border protection system based on EU values and human rights.

Sustainable prosperity and competitiveness

- Maintain the ambitious implementation of the European Green Deal (EGD) as a priority in the upcoming legislative term, channelling all necessary public and private resources;
- Establish a Savings and Investment Union to enhance financial support for green and digital transitions within the Single Market;
- Follow up on the Letta report with concrete actions to deepen the Single Market integration to enable the EU economy to respond to current and future challenges;
- Closely monitor the implementation of the Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act) and propose further legislation focused on incentivising sustainable and ethical use of AI;
- Increase the share of the EU's own resources in the EU's budget to enhance flexibility and to strengthen the link between policy objectives and financial resources;
- Increase the EU budget to match the increased demands arising from the current major socio-economic challenges and for much-needed investment, as underlined by the Draghi report;
- Work with Member States to overcome their differences and reach a compromise that will allow more joint debt issuance and increase the EU's borrowing capacity.

Social fairness

- Enhance the social dimension of the Single Market to promote inclusive growth, social justice, and equal opportunities for all;
- Pursue social justice and equality in Europe by implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), empowering social dialogue and promoting collective bargaining;
- Implement La Hulpe Declaration, shaping the future of social Europe to establish a well-being economy, fair wealth distribution, and stronger, more resilient social protection amid disruptive socio-economic changes.

Strong in the world and delivering in Europe

- Step up efforts to revise the EU's industrial strategy to counter disruptive practices introduced by other global powers;
- Diversify supply chains by fostering strategic partnerships and developing critical sectors to reduce dependency on non-EU actors while maintaining openness;
- Provide a credible enlargement perspective and clear timeline for the accession process with interim goals;
- Reaffirm that candidate countries aspiring to join the EU must fully respect democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in the accession process.

Furter to the above, the EU must prioritise the necessary institutional and governance reforms to build a more efficient and effective Union that is transparent and representative. To that end, the Commission should respond, together with the European Council, to the European Parliament's call for a Convention to reform the EU Treaties.
Institutional reform is not a matter of choice, but a necessity to ensure that the EU can meet the evolving needs of its citizens, face unprecedented global challenges and successfully manage future enlargement.

The European Movement International will follow closely the first 100 days of the new College of Commissioners and make sure that the proposals and promises included in President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines turn into concrete, people-centred actions.