

EPP Group Bureau Meeting, 16-17 May – Dresden, Germany

Towards an economic, social and institutional recovery of the European Union

During the panel discussion on the EU's economic, social and institutional recovery there was an exchange of views with Antonio Tajani, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Industry and Entrepreneurship and Vice-President of the European People's Party, Markus Kerber, CEO and Director General of the Federation of German Industries (BDI) and François Fillon, former French Prime Minister.

During his speech, François Fillon underlined that Europe is going through an "existential crisis", and that the EPP Group has a major role to play in these times: "No one is better able than the EPP Group to combine the two objectives without which the European Union is doomed to collapse: competitiveness and serious budgetary management," he said.

"Together, we have a political battle to fight to save the European ideal. To start with, we need to recall Europe's successes, and based on this, we need to defend the idea that Europe is an effective and original project. In a globalised world, Europe should stand firm in its defence of the values of freedom, justice and humanism," he said.

In Fillon's view, Europe also needs "a new economic doctrine founded on real European economic governance. This new doctrine should be based on two pillars," he said. "The first one is a much closer Franco-German union. I am in favour of something like a Franco-German confederation which will give Europe the engine it is missing back."

"The second pillar is an economic government, led by the Heads of State and Government of Eurozone countries. To make it efficient, we need to accept the idea of a European leader in charge of European finances, one who would have the power to define a common strategy and to control the practices of the Member States concerned."

On the topic of the next European elections, François Fillon said that these would be crucial. "The fight will be very tough as the crisis is feeding demagoguery and populism. But we should not give in. We need to convey that Europe's salvation is in more cooperation, more political vision."

Answering a question about French President François Hollande's ability to make the necessary reforms in France, he said that he had "his doubts", given the Socialists' constant opposition to pension reform over the last thirty years. "France needs to work more, so we should put an end to the 35-hour working week. We need to decrease labour costs, and also to reform the rules for unemployment allowances."

"The debate on austerity in Europe is a false one. It is more a question of common sense: when a country has too much debt, it will, in the end, always pay the price for this in terms of growth. So we need to stay firm on the need to have sound public finances. We also need a European strategy to support investment for the future," he concluded.