

A reform agenda for Europe's future



EPP GROUP PRIORITIES 2014-2019

The European Union is facing enormous challenges after the European elections. Millions unemployed, increasing migration levels, tough global competition and measures to overcome the crisis are coupled with a loss of trust in the ability of politics to deliver solutions.

The EPP Group in the European Parliament and its governments have led the reforms allowing the European Union to overcome the immediate crisis. We now want to equip the EU with a successful reform agenda for Europe's future, to enable it to meet the challenges ahead by improving Europe's competitiveness for more growth and jobs as well as regaining the trust of its citizens.

Europe is a continent of values and human dignity, reflected by the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The EU has to prove it is able to defend its Christian democratic values and its social model in the face of global competition while meeting the demographic challenge.

The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality should be applied structurally and thoroughly to decide whether European legislation is necessary or not. The voice of national parliaments in this regard should be heard and taken into account in line with Protocols 1 and 2 of the Lisbon Treaty.

We want the next European Commission to integrate the following aims into its work programme:

I. We have stabilised Europe following the crisis. On this basis we have to focus on growth and new jobs.

- The rules of the Stability and Growth Pact have to be applied. The Two Pack and the Six Pack agreed on must be fully implemented and respected. There must not be any politically-motivated changes and concessions. Responsibility today in meeting sustainable budgets will avoid burdening future generations with new debt.
- The essential instrument for improving Europe's competitiveness is the single market. Existing rules must be implemented and the single market for services completed. We insist the new Commission puts forward legislative proposals in order to pursue the digital agenda as a key priority and a tool to achieve the completion of the digital market. Common data protection rules, protection of intellectual property rights as well as proposals for their enforcement in a global economy are vital for realising the full potential of the digital market. We need a strong European strategy for internet security and against violations of the private sphere. Europe has the potential to become a world leader in the digital market.
- We need a re-industrialisation of Europe based on a coherent strategy and its implementation. The European Commission has to take the lead with such an initiative, enhancing our industrial competitiveness without placing an excessive regulatory burden on businesses.
- The Euro area must be led by a standing Chairman of the Eurogroup, who should be the Commissioner for Monetary Affairs and who should have, for the purpose of oversight over national budgets in the framework of the European Semester, a similar role to that of the Competition Commissioner. The Euro is our common destiny. We do not want the EU to be split into Euro and non-Euro Member States. Therefore use should be made of community institutions instead of setting up new bureaucratic structures. Any new instruments have to ensure that incentives and conditionality go hand-in-hand.
- We demand an EU framework that allows companies to invest more in research and development. Innovation is the future.
- Europe needs a joint energy policy that is sustainable, that leads to greater security, independence and diversity of our energy supply, as well as competitive and affordable energy prices that contribute to growth and jobs. In order to achieve this, we must invest more in the EU's internal cross-border energy infrastructure, and especially its interconnectivity. Only a functioning common market for energy based on market principles and pooling our purchasing power in negotiations with third-party suppliers can achieve this.
- The EU has undertaken great efforts in recent years to combat climate change. We now need realistic climate targets and a reform of the Emissions Trading System (ETS), allowing us to reduce CO2 emissions while keeping energy-intensive industries in the EU and preventing them from relocating jobs abroad, as well as reaching the agreed targets.
- Primary emphasis will be placed on the application and enforcement of the agreed Banking Union to ensure that a credible and robust system is established without delay.
- Europe has to create an SME-friendly environment, which includes providing the best financial and legal conditions for start-up businesses. Companies and small businesses must have access to credit at similar and affordable interest rates. The 2013 EIB capital increase has to be used fully. In addition, we need modern financial instruments such as venture capital, crowd funding and project bonds. SMEs must have better access to EU-level and national public procurement and funding.
- Europe's budget for structural policies is more than 350 billion Euros until 2020 and is a key tool for providing investment, competitiveness and solidarity. These financial means must be used in a growth-oriented way, while taking into account the country-specific recommendations.
- The mid-term revision of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) should allow further orientation towards innovation, investment, jobs and growth in Europe. The revision should also prepare the way for a new system of own resources, based on the work of the High-Level Group.

- The European Commission has started cutting red tape with the proposals presented by the Stoiber High-Level Group. The European Commission's anti-bureaucracy initiative, REFIT, must be implemented. Member States should assume their responsibility for cutting red tape. This process must be intensified and continued. We need an independent Impact Assessment Board to provide a neutral assessment of the consequences of EU rules. The implementation of EU law must be accompanied and verified at EU level in a coherent manner. During the next mandate of the European Commission, in order to fight bureaucracy and red tape, a Vice-President must be given the responsibility of continuously scrutinising EU legislation in all areas, evaluating practicality and necessity, and coordinating proposals on what legislation should be repealed, simplified and updated.
- The Commission should include a Commissioner with a subsidiarity portfolio and the particular responsibility for scrutinising the application of the subsidiarity principle in relation to new and existing EU legislation.
- Europe has to develop a maritime strategy to contribute to economic growth.
- The EU has to provide more added-value to the health of EU citizens, promoting preventive measures - in particular fostering healthy lifestyles and fighting for food safety and against food fraud. The financial and social burdens of non-communicable diseases like cancer have to be decreased through effective joint EU efforts, based on successful existing initiatives, like EPAAC, CANCON and Equity Action Joint Actions.
- The CAP has to be implemented in a non-bureaucratic manner, allowing Europe's agriculture to be competitive and to provide food security for 500 million citizens. CAP-based payments have to be focused on keeping jobs and boosting our rural areas.

II. We have turned Europe into an area of freedom, security and justice. Now we have to uphold our humanitarian values and defend Europe against crime and terror.

- In order to meet our humanitarian responsibility, the EU should set up a fully effective common asylum system and Member States must fully implement the existing rules of the common asylum system. Europe has to offer protection to political refugees and those fleeing civil wars. Legal migration into the job market is a national competence which we respect. We must tackle abuses and distinguish between refugees and economic migrants. Illegally-residing economic migrants must be returned to their countries of origin, in respect of international and EU law. The EU should provide better information about its immigration policy and the risks of irregular migration in the countries of origin of immigrants, while at the same time focusing on providing more targeted development and humanitarian aid.
- The next European Commission should comprise a Commissioner for migration issues in order to develop a common policy on asylum and immigration. Member States should give priority in labour market access to EU citizens.
- We want to make Europe's borders more secure, by increasing the financial, human and technical resources and strengthening the role and prerogatives of the border protection agency FRONTEX. Small countries and countries along Europe's coastline in particular face very specific challenges on migration issues. We see the disproportionate pressure on Member States and we have to find a response. We need responsibility and solidarity amongst Member States. We want to put an end to organised crime and human trafficking in order to prevent tragedies along Europe's coastline. Our aim is to find solutions which bring together support and solidarity for those Member States especially concerned by an increased influx of migrants on the one hand and effective measures against asylum abuse on the other hand.
- There can be no step back on a basic principle of the EU such as the freedom of movement. Abuses of the principle of freedom of movement must be combatted at national and EU level. We want to simplify and to increase the mobility of the EU's labour force. Social fraud and social dumping cannot be tolerated. The EU must review the criteria of family reunification.
- The Schengen area should be completed with a view to including all Member States that have applied to join and fulfil the necessary criteria.

- We need a strategy for cybersecurity and against cybercrime. Police and justice cooperation between Member States has to be improved in order to better combat online and offline crime.
- The fight for women's rights, including closing the wage gap and the fight against gender violence, must remain a priority. The rights of children must be respected and we need to ensure that their best interest is taken into account in every EU policy and legislative text.
- Combatting organised crime, corruption and terrorist organisations - including confiscation and the 'follow-the-money' principle - remains a priority for the EU, as does the fight against human trafficking, including paying special attention to the protection, support and rights of victims of terrorism and elaborating a European Charter for Victims of Terrorism.
- Media pluralism must be guaranteed in all Member States, while improving transparency about ownership and limiting political influence.
- Europe is a community of the rule of law. That is why we want an objective evaluation of the independence and the functioning of national justice systems. The EU respects the territorial and constitutional integrity of its Member States.
- The rights of persons belonging to autochthonous national minorities and language groups have to be guaranteed in all Member States. Special attention must be paid to the equal rights of the Romani population and diaspora in all Member States.
- We should revise the European Citizens' Initiative in order to increase citizen participation.

III. We want to fight to keep the social model sustainable in an ever-changing world.

- The EPP Group's guiding principle is the social market economy, which recognises social enterprises as a vehicle for social and economic cohesion across Europe, as they help build a pluralistic and resilient social market economy. Building on the strengths of a long social market economy tradition, social entrepreneurs are also drivers for change and creating innovative solutions to the major challenges of today.
- Measures must be stepped up to reach the Europe 2020 targets on eradication of poverty and raising levels of education across all levels of society and age groups.
- The guidelines of the Youth Employment Initiative must be fully implemented. The Commission must ensure that Member States fully implement and respect the youth guarantee scheme.
- We want to evaluate the social impact of future reform proposals and discuss the social consequences of policies, especially for families.
- Solidarity between generations is the key to sustainable social peace and the answer to demographic change in Europe. We support the strengthening of intergenerational solidarity.
- We recognise the important role of social partners.
- We need strong social safety nets for our citizens, but we say no to the harmonisation of social security systems.
- We want to actively combat tax fraud. We are against fiscal paradises.
- The Commission has to place its focus on strengthening the EU's cultural dimension through the protection of the EU's cultural diversity. The EU and its Member States should commit to the ambitious objectives for educational mobility. Education is a national responsibility, but we want to tackle the transnational dimension, in order to enhance the understanding of a wider European context and educational perspectives, opening horizons of global thinking and intercultural understanding.
- We call for an immediate end to the Turkish occupation of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus and we fully support all efforts under the auspices of the UN leading to a resolution of the Cyprus issue, in line with the values and principles upon which the EU is founded.

IV. Europe is an important player in the world. We want to strengthen the EU's external dimension.

- We want to see joint action in the EU's foreign policy activities to strengthen Europe's global role based on fundamental EU values such as the promotion of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Our priorities include a reinforced and redesigned neighbourhood policy, enhanced security and defence, a strong foreign policy on energy security and a well-anchored transatlantic bond.
- The EU has to speak with one voice in order to be heard. We need to strengthen the European External Action Service through full implementation of the mid-2013 review, and notably by reinforcing the political and coordinating role of the High Representative.
- We must continue building on and strengthening the transatlantic partnership as a top foreign policy priority, based on our shared common values and interests, in order to take global leadership on key foreign policy issues.
- We consider trade as one of the key elements of the EU external action policy. We aim for a global trade system that is as open and fair as possible in order to both build political links and create new jobs in Europe's exporting industries. In this regard, we promote the ongoing strategic partnership and association agreement negotiations. This includes in particular a trade and investment agreement with the United States that safeguards Europe's high standards in the areas of consumer, environmental, social and data protection, as well as a high level of protection for investments, and also contributes to enhancing the protection of US and EU citizens against terrorism, but also with other regions and areas such as Japan and other Asian countries, Canada, Latin America and the Mediterranean.
- We have to continue building tailor-made partnerships through the European Neighbourhood Policy based on the 'more for more' concept, strengthening democratic processes and the rule of law. We have to contribute to the stabilisation of these regions and bring them closer to Europe.
- We must stand by Ukraine and support a peaceful solution to the armed conflict in its eastern region, respecting its territorial integrity. We must closely monitor the necessary social, economic and political reforms and sign the remainder of the AA/DCFTA (Association Agreement/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area) with Ukraine and the AA/ DCFTAs with Georgia and Moldova as soon as possible. We must work towards swift visa liberalisation with the aim of visa-free regimes.
- We have to withstand Russia's continuous attempts to destabilise ENP countries, undermine the Eastern Partnership and restore its influence over former Soviet countries; we must adopt adequate sanctions against actions by Russia that violate international law.
- Enlargement has been one of the success stories of the European Union. Each candidate country should be judged exclusively on its own merits, while paying attention to the full respect of the Copenhagen criteria and the EU's integration capacity, which has to be strengthened. Especially on the Balkans, we stand by the Thessaloniki commitments. In the upcoming five years, we want to create the right preconditions for enlargement in this region. In addition, we will undertake a general discussion over the EU's geographical and political borders.
- As regards the special case of open-ended negotiations with Turkey, in the absence of a successful conclusion, we are determined to explore a privileged and upgraded partnership and therefore full membership is no longer our goal.
- We need to unleash the full potential of the Lisbon Treaty in CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) matters (e.g. Permanent Structured Cooperation), strengthen Europe's defence industry, prepare a new European Security Strategy and a new flexible and deployable model for the EU Battle Groups, and overcome capability shortfalls.
- We want the EU and its Member States to continue their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, with the objective of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. The EU should remain the leading global development assistance provider. However, we insist on prioritising such assistance to countries holding a high record in terms of good governance, respect for democratic principles and human rights.

The EU has to provide an answer to the concerns raised by the United Kingdom. The EPP Group wants to keep the United Kingdom as a member of the European Union. The EU's fundamental freedoms cannot be changed. In addition, the UK must not block future integration steps, especially in the Euro area.

We want to change Europe. We want to improve Europe. The EU has to offer a home for its citizens, and must not be perceived as a threat. With this reform agenda, the EPP Group is taking the lead in the debate on the future of the European Union. We are the political heart of Europe.