

EU COUNCIL PRESIDENCY

*WE ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR EUROPE IN DIFFICULT TIMES
TOGETHER, IN SOLIDARITY, FUTURE-ORIENTED.*

Germany will hold the EU Council Presidency at a **time of existential challenges** for the European Union and its citizens. The economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the continuing health threat posed by the virus, require a **comprehensive and common European response**. Europe can now prove that it **acts in solidarity** and that it is capable of providing support to the people in **difficult times**.

The most pressing tasks that we see as Social Democrats are to lead the European Union together and **with a clear course through the crisis**, to ensure that measures to overcome the crisis and its **consequences are implemented in a fair and sustainable manner**, to strengthen **solidarity and cohesion** in Europe and to give the European project a consistently **future-oriented direction**. We have replaced a European policy of finger-wagging with a good neighbourhood policy. We know that our country will always only do well to the extent that our European partners do well. Thus, we also want to use the German Council Presidency to ensure that Germany promotes cohesion through a reliable and inclusive crisis management, building bridges in Europe and helping to prepare our continent for the major challenges that we are facing.

We are convinced that a strong and fair Europe is in the best interests of Germany. The risk for Europe to break down or become deeply divided in the wake of the crises is real – not least because various external and internal actors have been working specifically towards such a division. Our answer must be: we stand for a **Europe of solidarity and cohesion**. No country, no region and no human being must be left behind in our efforts to overcome the crisis. The emergency measures to combat COVID-19 and the breakthrough to implement a strong European recovery programme are first and foremost the result of social democratic politics. We are prepared to make an extraordinary and joint effort. In this way we **contribute in solidarity to the economic and social reconstruction of Europe**. The **Multinational Financial Framework** and its development into a genuine budget for

the future are of particular importance in this respect. The steps towards this aim, which include credit financing for the recovery programme, clearly indicate that we are leaving behind the policy of red lines and are ready to move forward on the path to European unity now. During our Presidency we will therefore also discuss the **further institutional development and deepening of the EU**, in particular the creation of genuine revenue sources for the EU.

Once the crisis has been overcome, we do not want to resign ourselves to merely restoring the status quo ante. Our aim is to use the European Reconstruction Initiative **to make Europe fit for the future**. During the German EU Council Presidency in the coming months, we want to make ambitious progress in the **socio-ecological transformation**. Our investments in the reconstruction of Europe shall help to implement the European Green Deal and put in practice the European Pillar of Social Rights. Moreover, we need to make Europe fit for the digital era in many respects. To this end, we want to ensure that Europe has its own capacity to act and exert influence in the new technology areas, such as artificial intelligence or Big Data, that we preserve our values, such as the protection of privacy, also in the digital era, and that we secure decent and high-quality jobs and create new ones at the same time. European policies should actively shape the future of work, also in areas like education, training and further qualification, the reconciliation of work and family life, as well as gender equality, both in terms of remuneration and the appointment for management positions. We advocate a new consumer agenda that adapts consumer protection in the European Union to current digital and environmental challenges while ensuring a high level of consumer protection. We want a more sustainable orientation of our agricultural policy. This also includes ensuring animal protection and improving animal welfare in agricultural production.

Shaping the future means today rising up to the challenge of the climate crisis and working consistently on comprehensive solutions to combat climate change as the overarching threat of our time and to preserve an ecologically intact habitat for the generations to come. For us Social Democrats, the **European Green Deal** is the logical path to a modern, resource-efficient and competitive society. We are therefore committed to bringing all future resources of the Multiannual Financial Framework into line with the goals of the European Green Deal, the commitments pledged under the Paris Climate Protection Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Agenda.

We know that a progressive policy geared towards transformation will only be supported by citizens if we ensure that really all Europeans have a share in the European Union's promise of prosperity and if we manage to make the European Union more resilient to crises. This includes a **European framework for minimum wages and basic social security systems** to combat poverty. In this context, we are particularly committed to combating child poverty and support the implementation of an EU Child Guarantee. We need high minimum social standards throughout Europe so that all Europeans can enjoy an adequate livelihood. In view of the crisis, the stabilisation of low incomes is not only necessary from a social perspective but also an important support for the European economy. The Corona crisis has exposed problems in many systemically relevant industries and service sectors which we want to address. Fair working conditions and social security provisions must also be applied and ensured for new working patterns such as platform-based work. The enforcement of existing labour law and health and safety regulations for seasonal workers also needs to be urgently improved. As youth unemployment has become a particular structural side effect of the crisis in many places, we want to further strengthen the **European Youth Guarantee** and offer young people a perspective. We also advocate a strong **European Social Fund (ESF+)**, the importance of which has increased especially in times of the pandemic crisis and high unemployment. A strong ESF+ is an essential element to help citizens get access to better jobs and to provide fair prospects for starting a career. As a global trading power and community of values, the EU also has a responsibility for good working conditions along global supply chains. Corporate responsibility must also be strengthened through a **European supply chain law**. Voluntary commitments no longer suffice.

Further stabilisation instruments at the European level, such as a permanent **unemployment reinsurance scheme**, are necessary to mitigate macroeconomic shocks and ensure that national unemployment insurance schemes can effectively perform their important security function even in times of severe economic crises. The European instrument SURE – another initiative of European Social Democracy – which is intended to financially secure short-time work payments by the member states, is already a first concrete step that the European Union has taken towards a greater risk sharing in times of crisis. Finally, we want to work towards the completion of the European **Digital Union** and the **Banking and Capital Markets Union** to make Europe more stable and robust and to achieve further progress in European integration.

However, it is our view that European solidarity can only succeed if, in addition to the EU Member States, multinational companies also make their contribution to overcoming the crisis and financing the common good. More transparency and greater harmonisation of company taxation through uniform tax bases and minimum rates at both the European and global level are just as necessary as a **taxation** of large digital groups. The Financial Transaction Tax, which at the insistence of the SPD is soon entering its first implementation phase, will also make a decisive contribution.

Only a strong and sovereign European Union can help shape tomorrow's world and move us closer to our vision of a democratic, fair and sustainable society. The Corona pandemic has made us aware of the need for the European Union to become more independent of third parties. Therefore, strengthening **European sovereignty** is an essential condition for a more independent, crisis-resistant EU. This includes the relocation of vital production assets, such as medicines, back to the EU, the protection of critical infrastructure and other trade and industrial policy measures, the expansion of EU sanction policies and consistent endeavours to achieve technological sovereignty.

We can only represent and promote those values to the outside world which we implement and defend within the EU. In this context we rely on the foundation of European values that guarantee **democracy and the rule of law** in all Member States of the European Union. We want to use the Council Presidency to initiate binding mechanisms to **review European fundamental values and to sanction** fundamental violations. We will not stand by and watch the COVID-19 pandemic being used in some Member States as an excuse to restrict democracy and the rule of law. The crisis has also once again highlighted such phenomena like disinformation and hate speech. We advocate European regulations to effectively combat punishable online hate speech.

We will ensure that our common foundation will not be undermined from within the EU. This includes sharing unevenly distributed challenges among Member States in a fair way. That is why we want to bring forward a **functioning European Asylum System** with the necessary balance between responsibility and solidarity, which includes a reform of the Dublin system and provides a full right of asylum. As part of a comprehensive approach, legal migration routes should be established, smuggling of migrants should be further combated and at the same time the causes of flight and displacement should be addressed.

Only a united Europe has the strength to bring its common values to bear on the international stage, to help shape the world and to stand up for peace and human rights. **Strengthening the EU as an international actor** is therefore a priority of the German Presidency. To this end, we want to promote a **value-oriented European foreign and security policy** that focuses on crisis prevention, dialogue, stabilization and crisis management as the goals of a European force for peace. Especially in times of the Corona pandemic, multilateral approaches are more important than ever: we will either overcome this crisis together or not overcome it at all. As Europeans we have a special responsibility for our southern and eastern neighbours, our neighbouring continent of Africa and the Western Balkans, to whom we offer a fair partnership and cooperation on the road to the European Union. It is also important for Europe to **take on more responsibility in global crisis management** so that the vacuum of international coordination can be filled. We are concerned to see influential states, such as the USA, Russia and China, increasingly evading international obligations and following a unilateral course. There must not be a relapse into a time of selfish great power politics. The SPD advocates fair cooperation within the framework of an **engaged and solidarity-based multilateralism**. In a world of growing threats, a self-confident Europe must also take a leading role in global disarmament efforts. Against the background of increasing competition between the USA and China, the German Presidency will also have to answer the question of how to **deal with China in the right way**: the SPD is committed to ensuring that Europe acts in a united and target-oriented manner towards China. The aim is a common European position that is firmly rooted in the community of values of the West and strengthens European sovereignty in a rule-based order.

In our dialogue with the **Global South**, we advocate a concept of partnership and development that involves the Global North in the necessary transformation. We will only achieve the goals for a more social and sustainable world agreed under the umbrella of the United Nations if we pull together the forces in our societies in both North and South that share this vision and make it a reality. We want to use the German Council Presidency to apply this approach in the international orientation of the EU. This guides us in the further development of European trade policy as well as in our commitment to strengthen and refocus our development policy. We must take the necessary steps to avert impending famine disasters and make our contribution to overcoming the consequences of the acute pandemic worldwide.

Under the German Presidency negotiations on the future **relationship with Great Britain** will probably have to be concluded. Our goal is a close, forward-looking relationship with Great Britain. However, the cohesion of the EU27 and safeguarding fair competition conditions are of central importance to us. For this purpose, it is also important to prevent the United Kingdom from taking the disadvantages that are to be expected from exiting the EU as a reason to position itself as a tax haven. The exit agreement must be implemented without restrictions, in particular regarding the rights of EU citizens set out therein.

In this effort, Europe needs to play a decisive role. Within the framework of the **Trio Presidency**, Germany is already working in close coordination with Portugal and also Slovenia, which will take over the EU Council Presidency next year. As Social Democrats we would like to ensure that in the following year we will also be able to rely on a progressive European policy agenda.

As a European party, we – with our ministers in the Federal Government and our members of the Bundestag and the European Parliament – will make our contribution to a **successful German EU Council Presidency** in the second half of the year. It is one of the most important presidencies in a long time. Germany's responsibility for Europe is needed more than ever. We want to move forward courageously, stand together in solidarity and build political bridges in order to achieve European progress together in a difficult time.