

**Strategic Agenda 2024-2029**

The European Union was founded on the imperative of securing peace in Europe, building on cooperation, solidarity and common economic prosperity. This original promise still guides us and serves as the basis for our priorities for a strong and sovereign Europe.

The global political landscape is being reshaped by strategic competition, growing global instability, and attempts to undermine the rules-based international order. Russia has brought war back to our continent. In our neighbourhood, the situation in the Middle East is dramatic. Our natural environment is facing increasing damage and disruption due to climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The fast development of new technologies brings opportunities and potential risks.

These unprecedented challenges have led us to break new ground in our cooperation and integration in the past five years. Together, we have set key goals to fight climate change and put in place an ambitious framework for the digital transition. Together, we developed and distributed vaccines across Europe and beyond and set up a major recovery fund in response to a pandemic that affected our societies in unforeseeable ways. Together, we protected our economies during the energy crisis. And together, we have been providing Ukraine with significant military and economic support to defend itself against Russia's war of aggression and protect European security. But we will not rest here. We will live up to the call of the Union's founders and ensure that the creativity of our responses matches the size of the challenges ahead of us.

As the Union and Member States, we will combine our strengths and resources to face the coming years with unity and resolve. We will address the aspirations of our citizens. We will strengthen our competitiveness and become the first climate-neutral continent, making a success of the climate and digital transitions, leaving no one behind. We will tackle the challenges of migration. We will take the necessary responsibility for our security and defence and reinforce our capacity to act to defend our interests and become more influential in the world. We will take the lead in addressing global challenges, championing international law and institutions, fair global governance, inclusive multilateralism and sustainable growth and development.

Strong and competitive social market economies will be the driving force in achieving our ambitions. In today's hypercompetitive world, we need to unleash the European spirit of entrepreneurship. Europe is a continent of doers, makers and innovators. Trusting our companies to turn risks into opportunities will spur investment, boost economic growth and make Europe a world leader in green and digital industries and technologies.

Our values and the rule of law are our compass, both internally and externally. They are the foundation for a stronger, more prosperous and more democratic Union for our citizens.

The European Council agrees on the following priorities and invites the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission to put them into action during the next institutional cycle, respecting the institutional balance of powers as set out in the Treaties and the principles of conferral, subsidiarity and proportionality. The next Multiannual Financial Framework for the Union will have to reflect these priorities, ensuring that the EU budget is fit for the future and that European responses are given to European challenges. In this respect, we will work towards the introduction of new own resources.

## **A free and democratic Europe**

### *Upholding European values within the Union*

Our values are our strength. We will protect and promote our founding values – respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities – which remain the cornerstone of our Union.

We will promote and safeguard respect for the rule of law, which is the basis of European cooperation, upholding the principles of objectivity, non-discrimination and equal treatment of Member States. We will strengthen our democratic resilience, including by deepening citizen engagement, protecting free and pluralistic media and civil society, tackling foreign interference and countering attempts at destabilisation, including through disinformation and hate speech. We will strengthen democratic discourse and ensure that tech giants take their responsibility for safeguarding democratic dialogue online. We will promote our cultural diversity and heritage.

### *Living up to our values at global level*

The European Union shall continue to be the strongest supporter of the international legal order, steadfastly upholding the United Nations and the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. In particular, the European Union will pursue efforts to promote global peace, justice and stability, as well as democracy, universal human rights and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all international fora. We will strive for a reformed multilateral system, making it more inclusive and more effective.

## **A strong and secure Europe**

### *Ensuring coherent and influential external action*

The world around us has become more confrontational, transactional and uncertain. We will adapt to the ever-evolving circumstances, asserting the European Union's ambition and role as a strategic global player in the new multipolar geopolitical context.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine is also an attack on a free and democratic Europe. The European Union will stand by Ukraine as it fights to retain its independence and sovereignty and regain its territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. We will also support its reconstruction and the pursuit of a just peace. We will intensify our work to promote security, stability, peace and prosperity in our neighbourhood and beyond.

We will closely engage with partners and develop mutually beneficial strategic partnerships to address shared challenges. We will leverage both internal and external EU policies in the best interests of the Union in a well-coordinated manner.

*Strengthening our security and defence and protecting our citizens*

Europe must be a place where people are and feel free and safe. The European Union and Member States have taken bold steps to strengthen the Union's defence readiness and capacity, including increased defence spending. Going forward, we will invest substantially more and better together, reduce our strategic dependencies, scale up our capacities and strengthen the European defence technological and industrial base accordingly.

Increasing our security requires a solid economic base. We will mobilise the necessary instruments to bolster our security and the protection of our citizens, and to respond to new emerging threats. We will enhance interoperability between European armed forces. We will urgently improve conditions for scaling up the European defence industry by creating a better integrated European defence market and by promoting joint procurement. We welcome flagship projects and defence initiatives by Member States. We will improve access to public and private finance, exploring all options, including through the enhanced role of the European Investment Bank Group as a catalyst.

A stronger and more capable European Union in the field of security and defence will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains, for those States that are members of it, the foundation of their collective defence. We will cooperate with transatlantic partners and NATO, in full respect of the principles set out in the Treaties and by the European Council, without prejudice to the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and taking into account the security and defence interests of all Member States.

To strengthen security within the Union, we will fight crime offline and online and prevent and tackle corruption, using all the law enforcement and judicial cooperation tools of our Union. We will be resolute against organised crime and disrupt the flow of illicit profits from cross-border criminal activity. We will fight attempts to sow division, radicalisation, terrorism and violent extremism.

The European Union will strengthen its resilience, preparedness, crisis prevention and response capacities, in an all-hazards and whole-of-society approach, to protect our citizens and societies against different crises, including natural disasters and health emergencies. We will step up our collective response to cyber and hybrid warfare, foreign manipulation and interference and threats to our critical infrastructure. We will pay particular attention to enhancing societal resilience.

*Preparing for a bigger and stronger Union*

The new geopolitical reality underscores the importance of enlargement as a geostrategic investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity. There is new dynamism in the enlargement process. Both the EU and aspiring members now have a responsibility to make the most of this opportunity and communicate this clearly.

The European Union will follow a merit-based approach to accession with tangible incentives. It will support aspiring members in meeting the accession criteria through appropriate instruments and will use all possibilities to further advance gradual integration. It will also encourage reform efforts, notably with regard to the rule of law, as well as regional integration, good neighbourly relations, reconciliation and the resolution of bilateral disputes.

In parallel, the European Union will undertake the necessary internal reforms to ensure that our policies are fit for the future and financed in a sustainable manner and that the EU institutions continue to function and act effectively.

*Pursuing a comprehensive approach to migration and border management*

Ensuring that citizens can move freely within the EU is a fundamental achievement of the European Union and requires the proper functioning of the Schengen area. With this freedom comes the shared responsibility to fulfil and implement our common obligations and protect the EU's external borders effectively. This is a prerequisite for guaranteeing security and upholding law and order, in line with our principles and values.

Through its comprehensive partnerships approach, the European Union will continue to cooperate in a mutually beneficial way with countries of origin and transit. Together, we will address the long-term challenges of irregular migration and its root causes and work on returns. We will also explore the opportunities of migration, including through legal pathways. We will fight smuggling networks and break the business model of those who profit from this inhumane trade. We will consider new ways to prevent and counter irregular migration. We will find joint solutions to the security threat of instrumentalised migration.

**A prosperous and competitive Europe**

*Bolstering our competitiveness*

We are determined to strengthen the basis of our long-term competitiveness and improve citizens' economic and social wellbeing. We will work to increase their purchasing power, create good jobs and assure the quality of goods and services in Europe. We will reinforce our sovereignty in strategic sectors and make Europe a technological and industrial powerhouse, while promoting an open economy. We will close our growth, productivity and innovation gaps with international partners and main competitors. This requires a significant collective investment effort, mobilising both public and private funding, including through the European Investment Bank.

Our greatest asset in that endeavour is the Single Market, the long-term engine of prosperity and convergence that enables economies of scale. We will therefore deepen it further, notably in the areas of energy, finance and telecommunications. We will remove remaining barriers, particularly in relation to services and essential goods, and ensure equal access to the Single Market through improved connectivity. We will ensure a balanced and effective state aid and competition framework to preserve the integrity of the Single Market and a level playing field. SMEs will remain central to Europe's economic and social fabric.

To unlock the necessary investment potential, we will accelerate financial integration by achieving the Capital Markets Union and completing the Banking Union. We will create truly integrated European capital markets, which are accessible and attractive to all citizens and businesses and benefit all Member States.

Learning from our experience, we will not allow the undermining of our open markets. We will strongly promote the central role of the WTO and pursue an ambitious, robust, open and sustainable trade policy that allows fair trade agreements, opens third country markets to EU companies, defends EU interests, allows resilient and reliable supply chains to develop, guarantees a true level playing field and creates reciprocal market access opportunities. We will strengthen our economic security, reduce harmful dependencies and diversify and secure strategic supply chains, including by enhancing our maritime security. We will build up our own capacity in sensitive sectors and key technologies of the future, such as defence, space, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, semiconductors, 5G/6G, health, biotechnologies, net-zero technologies, mobility, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and advanced materials. Promoting innovation and research, as well as leveraging tools such as public procurement, is crucial in this endeavour.

#### *Making a success of the green and digital transitions*

On our path to climate neutrality by 2050, we will be pragmatic and harness the potential of the green and digital transitions to create the markets, industries and high-quality jobs of the future. We will provide a stable and predictable framework and create a more supportive environment for scaling up Europe's manufacturing capacity for net-zero technologies and products. We will invest in ample cross-border infrastructure for energy, water, transport and communications.

We will pursue a just and fair climate transition, with the aim of staying competitive globally and increasing our energy sovereignty. Accelerating the energy transition, we will build a genuine energy union, securing the supply of abundant, affordable and clean energy. This will require ambitious electrification using all net-zero- and low-carbon solutions, and investment in grids, storage and interconnections. We will develop a more circular and resource-efficient economy, driving forward the industrial development of clean technologies, reaping the full benefits of the bioeconomy, embracing clean and smart mobility with adequate network infrastructure. This will increase real income and purchasing power, thereby improving living standards for all EU citizens.

We will exploit the untapped potential of data, promote data interoperability, and encourage investment in game-changing digital technologies in Europe, advancing their application throughout the economy, while ensuring privacy and security. This will require cutting-edge digital infrastructure. Building on the EU digital identity, we will create new EU-wide high-quality e-services.

The European Union will promote a competitive, sustainable and resilient agricultural sector that continues to ensure food security. We will champion vibrant rural communities and strengthen the position of farmers in the food supply chain. We will continue to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems, including oceans. We will strengthen water resilience across the Union.

*Promoting an innovation- and business-friendly environment*

In an increasingly knowledge- and data-driven economy and a global and competitive market, Europe will accompany, nurture and grow its businesses and industry, attract and retain talent, and remain an attractive location for investment.

We will boost Europe's research and innovation capacity in emerging and enabling technologies, including for dual use. Achieving industrial strength in key sectors also requires the Union to safeguard fair competition, fight unfair practices, and ensure a level playing field both internally and globally.