

Vibrant Europe Forum

Europe for People

Declaration: A Vibrant Europe for People

The signatories to this declaration affirm their active support for the EU and its positive development. We aim for a vibrant Europe for all Europe's citizens, which helps deliver safer, stronger communities, nurture every individual talent and holds out a realistic hope of betterment for themselves and their children.

We want a Europe that aims for higher and sustainable growth, with outcomes that promote full employment and reduced wage inequality. Crucial to achieve this are trade agreements in which sustainability is rewarded, a migration policy which is a win-win for both the receiving country and the migrant, and a decisive pooling of responsibility, which Europe's nations must accept, for their external relations with the rest of the world.

The European Union should provide a vibrant framework for the development of our economies and societies. To do this the EU must work closely with regional and national Governments, in the spirit of mutual reinforcement, where trust is restored as the leading organizing principle, accountabilities are clear and transparent and executive decision-making is devolved to the maximum possible extent.

Vibrant must be the catchword for this new dynamic Europe, where creativity and entrepreneurship can blossom, new products and services originate, and it is good to live because a strong sense of community offers fellowship and security.

Europe has been a tremendous asset for its citizens. In the post WW II decades, European integration facilitated unprecedented economic growth and strong convergence between poorer and richer member states. But for the past decade and more, Europe has found it difficult to cope with the realities of a fast changing world where the new emerging economies of other continents have substantially reduced worldwide income inequality but at the same time added to Europeans' sense of insecurity.

At the same time the relative power of even the largest EU member states has dramatically diminished. In the old world of the G7, more than half the members were EU member states. Today, in the G20, which has now become the major forum for world economic debates, only one fifth of the members are European. With Europe only amounting to some 8% of the world population, individual European countries will have less and less leverage on the world stage. Europe as a whole faces the choice of either hanging together to remain influential and relevant, or succumbing one by one to the whims and demands of other world powers.

A Europe that successfully hangs together could mean so much more in the hearts and minds of its citizens. It could navigate a careful course between the strong desire for both individual freedom and community belonging, within a European tradition of openness, which is part of Europe's best traditions.

To believe in a vibrant EU that is more influential in shaping globalisation to our citizens' benefit does not mean that decision-making and responsibility needs to be pushed upwards to the anonymity of some higher level of governance: communities can and should be strengthened. With the aim of contributing to convergence within and between EU member states in living conditions, they should be financially empowered by higher levels of governance to take control of their future. Each community should take responsibility for its own 'social contract': its own particular balance between rights and responsibilities within the welfare state, as well as taking decisions on where public intervention is needed, or private endeavour should be relied upon, on issues such as housing and schooling.

The financial resources for sustaining this social contract will be derived from enhanced sustainable growth across the whole EU, achieved by the encouragement of creativity and entrepreneurship in an overall setting of full employment, yet leaning strongly against increased wage inequality. Our aim is to influence decisively the European Parliamentary elections of 2014 with our vision of a vibrant revitalised EU. Each signatory within her or his own circle, be it a political party, a group of employers or trade unionists, an academic or civil society network or otherwise, spreads these notions and contributes to their elaboration.

The vision brings six different strands of thinking, each of which present their own dilemmas and choices:

- A vibrant, dynamic Europe, which appeals as a place to thrive for intelligent, creative minds and hands.
- A Europe, which offers hope of improvement and the prospect of real social mobility for all citizens, while being mindful of the inherent dangers implied in the present trend towards greater inequality in income and wealth.
- A Europe, which acts as a responsible steward to future generations and follows a no-regret course in tackling climate change and preserving the natural environment.
- An open Europe for all those who want to contribute to the common European cause in a genuine spirit of tolerance, social trust and community cohesion, at all times respecting individual freedom of choice as a fundamental European value.
- A secure Europe, which continues to live in peace by furthering its internal economic and social cohesion and by intense cooperation with neighbouring countries on its borders in a meaningful partnership of respect, recognition and compromise.
- A European Union whose institutions regain the trust and respect of the ordinary European citizen.

So that Europe is more than the sum of the EU member states.

We realize that most of us come from countries in one specific part of Europe and look forward to a discussion with colleagues from other parts of Europe with the openness to come to a joint position which also encompasses their views.

First signed in Vaeshartelt (Maastricht) March 23, 2012

Philippe Aghion (Harvard University)
Rob Bauer (Maastricht University; Global Real Estate Sustainability Benchmark/GRESB)
Nadine Burquel (Secretary General European Centre for Strategic Management of Universities/ESMU)
Maria Victoria Calabrese (Educational Testing Service/ETS Global)
Piet Eichholtz (Maastricht University; Global Real Estate Sustainability Benchmark/GRESB)
Bas Eickhout (GroenLinks Netherlands; MEP)
Wim Kok (former Prime Minister of the Netherlands; President Club de Madrid)
Roger Liddle (Member House of Lords; Chairman International Think Tank Policy Network)
Søren Winther Lundby (Managing Director New Europe; CEO Global Citizen)
Judith Merkies (Partij van de Arbeid Netherlands; MEP)
Niccolo Milanese (Co-President European Alternatives)
Martin Paul (President Maastricht University)
Ronald Plasterk (Partij van de Arbeid Netherlands; MP)
Lilianne Ploumen (former chair Partij van de Arbeid Netherlands)
Sir Julian Priestley (former Secretary General European Parliament; European Public Policy Advisers)
Jo Ritzen (former Dutch Minister; former Vice-President World Bank; IZA Senior Advisor)
Axel Schäfer (Social Democrats Germany; MP)
Rudolf Scholten (former Austrian Minister; Österreichische Kontrollbank AG)
Luc Soete (Director United Nations University-Merit)
Frans Timmermans (former Dutch Minister; Partij van de Arbeid Netherlands; MP)
Lousewies van der Laan (former leader Social Liberal Democrats D66 Netherlands)
Godelieve van Heteren (President European Movement Netherlands)
Rens van Tilburg (Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations)
Nout Wellink (former President De Nederlandsche Bank/DNB; Governor International Monetary Fund/IMF)
Klaus F. Zimmermann (Director Institute for the Study of Labor/IZA; University of Bonn)

Jo Ritzen

Maria Victoria Calibrese

Frans Timmermans

Philippe Aghion

Wim Kok

Ronald Plasterk

Rens van Tilburg

Piet Eichholtz

Lousewies van der Laan

Klaus F. Zimmermann

Roger Liddle

Luc Soete

Niccolo Milanese

Nout Wellink

Rob Bauer

Axel Schäfer

Judith Merkies

Søren Winther Lundby

Nadine Burquel

Godelieve van Heteren

Rudolf Scholten

Bas Eickhout

Martin Paul

Lilianne Ploumen

Sir Julian Priestly

Current number of signatories: 25 (as of April 10, 2012)

Contact: Vibrant Europe Forum, Jo Ritzen (former Dutch Minister and World Bank Vice-President; IZA Senior Advisor)
vef@merit.unu.edu Tel: +31 43 388 44 39