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PES 10TH CONGRESS
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For a Tolerant, Inclusive and Democratic Europe Adopted by the PES Congress

This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Schengen Agreement, which is a cornerstone for more inclusive, free and open societies. The Agreement shows that the signatory countries trust each other sufficiently to live without internal borders. This idea is under threat today.

The Party of European Socialists (PES) pledges to stand firmly for peace, progress and prosperity for all Europeans by fighting the demons of the past. What we have achieved so far is today taken for granted. The result is a worrying backlash against European values and their democratic essence, challenged by extremist ideologies and movements.

We might risk the rise of illiberal democracies legitimised by elections, where freedom and individual liberties are under threat. Rule of Law is the very essence of democracy. The abuse of power is a great danger that only democracy can address.

Strengthening the Rule of Law

Promoting and safeguarding our core values with a balance between freedom, security, protection and privacy on the basis of democratic principles is our main challenge. The PES reasserts its attachment to fundamental rights as outlined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and in particular to the right of every EU citizen to:

- Human dignity;
- Liberty and security, right to marry and right to found a family, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and information, freedom of assembly and of association, education, asylum, protection in the event of removal or expulsion or extradition;
- Equality before the law, non-discrimination, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, equality between men and women, protection of the rights of the child and the elderly, integration of people with disabilities;



- Access to fair and just working conditions, to social security and social assistance, to healthcare and access to services;
- Voting rights and freedom of movement and residence.

The EU is faced with significant challenges in standing up for the Rule of Law. In the case of breaches by a Member State, EU action is limited. In the last decade, conservative leaders, including Viktor Orbán in Hungary have regularly breached the Rule of Law by violating rights and freedoms. Corruption is also a serious threat that the EU has to address in several Member States. Apart from political dialogue, the only way to act is by using Art. 7 of the Treaty on European Union which introduces an alert procedure with a final provision to suspend voting rights. This option is so serious that to date it has not been applied.

We welcome the EU Rule of Law Framework established by the European Commission, nevertheless we ask for the introduction of an **EU Democracy Scoreboard** (to function as an **early warning system**) to monitor whether Member States are complying with EU common values and respect for fundamental rights. This does not require the founding of new agencies or institutions. It requires better coordination, enhanced cooperation and making full use of both existing legislative and non-legislative tools in the relevant areas.

The EU must meet this challenge to ensure that the Rule of Law is applied and guarantees equal justice to all.

United against fear

Our core European values are under attack on multiple fronts. We are witnessing the rise of extremist movements on all fringes of the political spectrum with ideologies promoting intolerance, disrespecting minorities and polarising our societies. Austerity policies, the democratic deficit and continuing economic challenges for citizens have weakened trust in political institutions. This has created fertile ground for the re-emergence of nationalism, hate speech and the politics of fear – the very foundations of right-wing populism and extremism. These parties create false propaganda and weaken our social peace.

Europe has faced several terrorist attacks deliberately aimed at creating mistrust within our societies, threatening democracy and our most fundamental values. Europe needs a coordinated and collective answer to these threats that respects fundamental liberties. It is our common responsibility to improve coordination at the European level. The dramatic events earlier this year have shown clearly that action is needed.

We believe that the European Union must guarantee safety for all citizens, and therefore strengthen the cooperation between Member States. In doing so we must ensure the correct balance is reached and full respect for European citizens' fundamental rights is achieved. Combatting terrorism and radicalisation must go hand in hand with an intensified dialogue to promote truly inclusive societies. We want a society where people's rights are guaranteed by law, irrespective of race, disability, religion, origin, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation or any other form of discrimination.

Recalling the PES Leaders declaration of February 2015, we deeply deplore any attempt to justify terrorist attacks, or their use to stigmatize any community and to limit anyone's freedom. These attacks have only strengthened our resolve to stand up for inclusive and free societies and our respect for the freedom of expression.



We deeply deplore the vile reaction of far-right parties that have tried to benefit from the attacks by responding with their own campaign of hatred. Our response to terrorists and extremists is unity. We strongly believe that there cannot be any security without respect for democratic principles and the Rule of Law.

The PES firmly rejects any form of anti-Semitism, antigypsyism, Islamophobia, racial hatred, homophobia, xenophobia, transphobia and all forms of intolerance towards people with disabilities. We also reject hate speech, which constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence inflicted upon communities.

Seven years ago the European Commission proposed a law banning discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, but also age, disability and religion, outside of employment. We deeply deplore that seven years later, in spite of strong pressure from the European Parliament, the proposal still remains blocked in the Council. We therefore need to continue our struggle for a European directive against all forms of discrimination, inside and outside the working environment.

Active policies to fight any form of discrimination and intolerance are needed. The European guidelines for respect and protection of all minorities must be carefully implemented. Roma are especially in need of access to education, health care, housing and actions counteracting segregation.

Empowerment and involvement of European citizens

Europe is experiencing a decline in civic participation, decreases in political and social capital, lower levels of voter turnout, especially at European elections and a lack of trust in politics and politicians.

The PES will address abstention and disenchantment towards politics. Our objective is to re-engage with all citizens. To enhance civic participation and strengthen democracy, tolerance and fundamental freedoms we must invest more in civic education and education in values and rights to build inclusive societies.

The PES sees the problem of voting abstention as a major political challenge. As democrats we must be able to convey what democracy is about, especially to younger generations. Today electoral systems vary greatly from country to country, fewer and fewer citizens use their democratic right to vote.

Our political family has a special responsibility in ensuring that the fundamental right to vote is and remains a reality for all voters across Europe. Therefore, we support electoral reforms which extend the possibility to vote and simplifies the system to make sure that everyone can be part of the democratic process both at National and European level. We want to explore the benefits of early voting, to increase accessibility of polling stations and to mobilise young voters.

PES will work towards the reform of the European Electoral Act with a view to strengthening the European dimension of European elections as well as the notion of European citizenship. It remains important that we raise the level of significance of the European Parliament. We need to strengthen its democratic powers so that every individual considers



their vote to be valuable. That is the main and intrinsic motivation for people to get out and vote. The social democratic family needs to elaborate a common electoral strategy for the next European elections. The PES needs to engage people in presenting the European political issues at stake during those elections. We had a common Manifesto, a common candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission, we need to build on these important steps via a continental campaign that can promote the issues and the strategy of social democrats.

We strongly believe that we, social democrats, have to put democracy, the Rule of Law, our values and above all European citizens at the core of our actions. The PES and its member parties and organizations must engage in all relevant processes to earn people's trust and confidence in politics, voicing their values and articulating their aspirations by offering real, progressive political solutions, distinct from those of other European political parties.

In summary the PES urges all European political parties to embrace the following:

- an **EU Democracy Scoreboard** to function as an **early warning system**, namely to verify thoroughly that there is respect for fundamental rights and the Rule of Law not only in those countries applying for membership of the EU but also States who are already Members;
- a proposal for a **binding procedure** in case of any breach of our fundamental values and rights by any of the EU Member States;
- a strong commitment to solve the remaining legal issues standing in the way of much-awaited **accession to the European Convention on Human Rights**;
- The adoption of the **EU anti-discrimination Law** to ensure equal treatment regardless of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation;
- Explore the **simplification** of voting and registration systems and extension of voting.

The PES, in line with its Statutes, will not accept any declaration or action threatening our shared principles, nor to have any relations with a Party not sharing them. We make the motto of the EU, “united in diversity”, ours, and ask all other European political parties to do the same.

