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Comrades and friends,

Welcome to Prague, and to our Council.

You may have noticed recently that the world is not quite as we would like it.

It feels like we social democrats have not made much progress recently. Sometimes it feels like we are actually going backwards.

I'm not just talking about Brexit.

I'm not just talking about the election of Donald Trump.

I'm not just talking about the financial crisis, or the migration crisis, or the far right, or the rise of austerity-only politics, or terrorist attacks, or the overrunning of Ukraine, or Russia, or Turkey...

You can finish the list as well as I can. It is frighteningly long.

And what is our response to each of these dreadful events?

It's always the same. Each time we say:

"Well, this is a wake-up call for social democracy!

"It's time to make a fresh start! We must stop being complacent! We must change how we do things!"

My question to us all today is:

How many wake-up calls do we need?

Are we sleeping so soundly now that the alarm keeps ringing and ringing, and we don't stir?

Or maybe we hear it, but each time we roll over and hit the 'snooze' button – saying to ourselves “Next time!”.

Of course I'm being unfair. I know we're not sleeping.

We are fighting.

We are fighting many different battles, in many different countries, on many different issues.

And I know as well as you do that all these battles are important.

But the problem is that it is too easy for people to overlook small battles.

This is not a series of small issues which we can solve one at a time. It is a big, systemic crisis.

We learned from Eurostat that one in four Europeans – one in four! – are now at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

That's more than 120 million people whose lives are affected by poverty!

And we are told by the OECD that inequality has risen this year in more than two thirds of EU countries.

These are problems across the whole continent – from the richest countries to the poorest ones.

And they are problems we understand. We have always been fighting against poverty and inequality.

That means we understand why people are losing faith in the institutions that we have built. Why they are desperately looking around for new solutions to these problems.

And when they look at us social democrats, what do they see?

They see a party that is *part of the establishment*.

They see politicians who compromise, policies that are cautious, activists who talk about familiar ideas.

They see a party that is institutionalised – that has helped to build the institutions, and that is now invested in them.

They see us and the conservatives and the liberals, and from where they are standing, they see hardly any differences between us.

They see the status quo.

And then, of course, they look past all of us and see the populists.

Whenever there are people desperate for something, there is always someone willing to sell it to them.

They hear the populists say: “You’re right, there is a problem!

“And nobody can solve it except us. We are different. We are not part of the institution. We are listening to *you*.

“Lend us your vote and we will close your borders, tear up your alliances, cut your taxes, get rid of your foreign neighbours... we will solve everything!”

So it seems we are in trouble.

We are trapped in Europe between a conservative majority that is obsessed with a grim austerity agenda, and a populist minority who will do or say anything to get attention and power.

And the really frightening thing is that it is the populists – usually the far right – who are setting the agenda in Europe!

They are loud, they are vocal, they are influential, and at the moment, it looks like they are winning.

How can this be possible?

How are we, the progressives and social democrats of Europe, allowing it to happen?

I think, friends, we have to be honest here.

We should be setting the agenda – *but we are not*.

In every way, we should be stronger.

We have more votes. More elected representatives. More lively and committed activists. A proud heritage. Better ideas. Stronger values.

So why are we allowing the populist right to dictate the direction of travel – and to decide the future of Europe?

Why are we not setting the agenda?

We know that when we speak loudly with one united voice – people listen to us.

And we know that when we all act together to change the world – the world is changed.

It's good that we are meeting here together in Prague, in this beautiful country with such a proud political tradition.

This is the place where we made the historic decision, back in 2009, to back a common candidate for the European elections.

So this is the place where, together, we can be inspired to fight.

But there will be no more fighting a hundred small battles and ignoring the big picture.

There will be no more flag-waving.

We need to mobilise!

Are we ready to take the fight to the populists, and win it?

Are we ready to stand up for our values and our policies? Not just to say we support them – but actually to fight for them – in Parliament, in the Council?

Will we fight for our Youth Plan? Will we fight for a properly funded Youth Guarantee – when our opponents want to undermine it?

And after so many years of austerity, of slow growth, of big infrastructure deficits...

Are we ready to rethink what our priorities are? Shouldn't we be a little less obsessed with financial and budgetary data, and a little more concerned about unemployment, schools and hospitals?

So are we ready to act together to fix the Stability and Growth Pact?

Are we willing to fight for minimum wages everywhere in Europe, as our comrades did so successfully in Germany? So that all European citizens can benefit from a decent wage!

Are we willing to make a stand for stronger social rights – to stand up for social rights, and not sacrificed them on the altar of economic freedom?

If we want to change lives, we must do more than talk. We must act.

That means fighting and winning elections – including the European elections in 2019.

Are we ready to give ownership to our activists and to our members, to have a single common candidate chosen by them in open primaries?

Are we ready to show people that their engagement, their votes, can make a difference?

That they have the power to deliver policies that make a difference to their own lives?

I am drawing a line here.

We have had enough wake-up calls.

We will never roll over and press 'snooze' again.

Our movement has a long history of radical ideas, of thinking outside the box.

We are not the status quo!

And we do not ACCEPT the status quo.

Not on austerity.

Not on inequality.

Not on poverty, unemployment, social exclusion.

We must fight our own fights.

And to do that, we must not accept a wipeout of all three European institutions – we must not allow the centre right to hold all three presidencies.

That's why we are meeting here in Prague right now.

We don't need another wake-up call. We are wide awake and ready to go.

So let's go!