



DARE TO CHANGE.

Dear colleagues and comrades,

Why are so many of us so passionate about the job we do? Because we care. We care about others, about their well-being and yes, even their happiness. Many of our voters feel all of this is under threat and they are not convinced we have the answers.

It is in this spirit of commitment I run for the presidency of our Group. With your approval, it would be an honour for me to lead our Group towards the important EU elections to come.

The challenges we face are manifold. To be well prepared is half the victory. In the short period of time we have left, we need to strengthen our internal organisation, leading it fairly and firmly, offering each member the opportunities to plan their contributions and debates properly. Moreover we should stand by our core values, translating them into a fresh and inspiring narrative, without being distracted by the siren voices of Macronism. The S&D Group should have the clear ambition to lead a progressive coalition in the Parliament and rebuild trust in the European institutions.

Empowering citizens is what we stand for

We should be well aware that the changing risks citizens face, require a higher degree of empowerment. We need to have the courage to change the economic paradigm and offer a fresh and trustworthy narrative, providing protection and empowerment suited for the 21st century.

More than ever we need to revive social democracy's bottom-up approach in order to strengthen our alliance with working people and families, by visiting local communities, listening and learning from their experiences and showing how the EU can empower them.

Many Europeans are worried about the way the EU relates to the world and vice versa. We need a strong EU in the world, now more than ever. Multilateralism is at risk and we need to work with others for a fair global governance, promoting fair trade agreements on which so many jobs depend. We need a global approach for humane migration policies within the framework of the sustainable development goals, a common geostrategic security policy and soft power, such as climate change diplomacy.

Rebuilding trust is key to European progress

We are experiencing a crisis of trust, trust in the institutions, experts, the media, governments and politics. Commitment to the public case is part of our DNA. Hence, it is of the utmost importance that social democrats restore trust in public institutions. More than ever we have to be identified as the protectors of public healthcare and safety nets, public education and public infrastructure and transport. If we let these crucial services being destroyed by our opponents' policies, the blame is unfortunately on us.

If we want citizens to trust public institutions, our Group needs to take the lead in restoring trust in the European Parliament as a strong and transparent institution that takes good care of public money. This means pursuing a maximum of openness and transparency, combatting the fact that in this EU, too many backroom deals serve the economic elites.

Changing Europe from within

Change, it is said, starts from within. We must stop bowing our heads and instead take pride in the historical achievements of our political family, in the conviction that what we did before, we can do again and even better.

We must lead by example and rebuild our moral authority on trust, honesty and fairness. Everyone in our group can contribute to that goal and we should listen to each other. We will need all progressive voices to act as a dam to the spread of populism, neo-nationalism and neo-liberal greed. Opening up does, however, not mean watering down our ideals, Macronising social democracy or mistakenly assuming that 5 stars is a quality grading system. At this crossroad in challenging times, we need to turn left, with confidence and a strong belief in our core values.

Leading a progressive European coalition

We did it before, when we decided to break up the Grand Coalition. We led a progressive alternative, which achieved successes: we stopped the Commission from dumping the Clean Air package and the Waste package, which we successfully transformed into the Circular Economy package; we managed to obtain the due diligence clause in the Conflict Minerals regulation and, despite the EPP's opposition, we installed the Dieselgate EMIS commission and raised the ambitions on the Clean Energy package and the Social Pillar. We succeeded to form the PEST committee on glyphosate, we are in frontline regarding the battle of Tax Justice, won first concrete achievements against tax avoidance in the EU and managed to impose the whistleblowers protection into the EC's agenda.

We did it out of respect for our leftists convictions, and have to continue on this path today against our conservative opponents.

- ▶ During the last year of this term, we must prepare our Group for the elections to come. Getting the details and logistics correct is the first step to everything else. I would propose following actions:
- ▶ Our Group should not let the Commission's timetable dictate our work. We must and we will create the space to discuss and debate the future of our movement as well as Parliamentary work
- ▶ Interconnectedness is crucial for a Group to perform. We should all feel part of a European Group in which opinions and views can be openly discussed in order to articulate a common goal and harvest the full potential of our Group.
- ▶ The Leader's office and Group staff will flag up files and dossiers that are likely to be used against us in good time in order to plan our approach and be one step ahead of our opposition.
- ▶ We should develop - now - the networks that help us build a progressive coalition in the next term. This means reaching out to civil society, to our traditional allies such as trade unions, NGO's, associations and beyond.
- ▶ We should make more use of our party PES and our networks and think tanks, many of whom are already working on ideas for the future of our movement. They should be involved in our discussions.
- ▶ We must inspire the next generation to join our movement, and not someone else's. The S&D should build youth movements led by young activists. Feeling European should automatically mean being progressive.
- ▶ Our mechanisms must be updated. To be better coordinated we must be better organised online.

In my home town everyone knows the song by a local left-wing folk singer with the title: A Singer is a Group. For me that is the essence of democratic, participative leadership: the knowledge that without the Group, no true leadership can exist. It is in that spirit of openness I run for the presidency of our group. I am determined to build on my experience as a woman in politics; as local councillor, minister on both the Belgian as the Flemish governments and member of our S&D group. Together we can finalise the important dossiers still on the table and prepare for the elections to come.

I am more than happy to answer your questions and listen to your suggestions.

If we want to change Europe for the better, we must start from within. Dare to change.

Kathleen.