



**Group of the Progressive Alliance of
Socialists & Democrats
in the European Parliament**

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Dear President von der Leyen, dear Ursula,

Ahead of your last State of the Union address this term, please allow us to set out the position of the S&D Group when it comes to the assessment of our common work since your election in 2019, and our expectations until the end of your mandate.

The S&D Group supported your candidature for Commission President at the beginning of this mandate, but **our support was conditional on your political guidelines**.

Four years later, none of us could have predicted the COVID-19 pandemic or Russia's war of aggression, and the devastating impacts across our continent. However, the S&D Group is proud of our common endeavour and response to these crises. We have shown that by working together, a strong and solid alliance of pro-European forces has been capable of innovative, bold and progressive solutions, which represents a welcome departure from the previous, failed obsession with austerity.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we called for a recovery fund and the child protection package, led negotiations on the EU digital Covid certificate, laid the ground for the European unemployment benefit insurance scheme, and spearheaded the impulse towards a European Health Union.

And from day one of Putin's war, the S&D Group has been a leading force in its support for Ukraine, including military aid and sanctions against Russia, and measures to ensure the EU takes greater responsibility for its own security and deeper cooperation in the field of our common security and defence policy. Indeed, you and the High Representative have enjoyed our full and unambiguous backing. We also strongly support Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova as EU candidate countries, alongside our continued strong support for the EU's enlargement to the Western Balkans.

We acknowledge the role played by European cohesion policy in response to both Covid and the war, as an indispensable solidarity mechanism and key contributor to economic recovery and the green and digital transitions, providing immediate assistance and leaving no one and no region behind. It is **crucial that the funding of cohesion policy remains strong and is not undermined**, for the current and post-2027 MFF.

We are also immensely proud of our intensive and successful work together on the European Green Deal. We pay tribute to the groundbreaking efforts of outgoing Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans. Under his leadership, the European Green Deal has been an unparalleled and unprecedented success and thanks to the S&D Group, it undeniably has a red heart consisting of tangible solidarity measures ensuring no one is left behind. We hope that Europe's loss will be the Netherlands' gain, and we will continue to work to ensure the paramountcy of a just transition, protection of households, in particular the most vulnerable, and involvement and proper representation of workers and consultation with all stakeholders. The Green Deal is also the vehicle through which we must once and for all terminate our dependence on Russian gas and fossil fuels.

We deplore the rightwards and populist drift of the EPP Group towards an anti-Green Deal position, and its increasing shift away from our collective pro-European and progressive endeavours. Please be assured that the S&D Group's strong and stable leadership as the real motor for change remains unwavering and we will not put at risk the protection and health of our citizens and our planet for unrealistic populist messaging, fake news, and short-term political gain, nor as a way of waging personal battles.

We cannot understand **your damaging silence on this issue, even more so after Parliament's positive vote on the Nature Restoration Law, and we consequently urge you once and for all to send a clear message of unambiguous support for the continuation of the Green Deal project** and in particular support the speedy adoption of all outstanding files, including nature restoration, pesticides and soil protection. We deplore the continued lack of a REACH proposal, which is desperately needed to protect human health and the environment from dangerous chemicals. We also ask you to confirm that the proposed 2040 climate target will be fully based on the latest available science and the Paris Agreement.

On the economic and social front, progress has been made, in particular with the minimum wage directive, the long-awaited proposal on reforming the fiscal rules and additional flexibility for strategic investments and debt reduction paths. However, more remains to be done on tax fairness, and we are still missing a permanent Eurozone fiscal capacity, based on the success of SURE and the RRF. Such a capacity should provide sustained and stable support for Europe's necessary investment across economic cycles, while acting simultaneously as a meaningful countercyclical stabiliser and allowing for a stronger and more autonomous Europe, far better prepared to face global challenges. **Jumping from crisis to crisis, from *ad hoc* temporary instrument to *ad hoc* temporary instrument is simply poor governance.**

We will also continue to push for **further integration of the European Pillar of Social Rights into the European Semester**, and for a more democratic process with Parliament closely involved in setting macroeconomic and social priorities through the ordinary legislative procedure.

In 2019, our support for your presidency and your Commission was conditional on the strong and specific social commitments which you agreed to include in your programme. These included an action plan to fully implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, a commitment to a legal instrument to ensure every worker in the Union has a fair minimum wage, the setting up of the European Child Guarantee, converting the Youth Guarantee into a permanent instrument, and revising the European Works Council Directive to strengthen democracy at work.

We applaud and take credit for the **Porto Summit and Action Plan, which would not have been possible without the S&D family**. However, in light of recent events, the severe cost of living crisis and the continued gender gap in the labour market we must now go even further, including further targets for quality job creation, at least 80% collective bargaining coverage by 2030, gender balance in employment, zero deaths at work, and the eradication of homelessness by 2030. This must be complemented by a comprehensive European anti-poverty strategy with ambitious and binding poverty reduction targets, as well as legislation on minimum income schemes.

The S&D Group has been the driving force behind many achievements in the digital sphere since 2019. Your Commission has played a leading role in setting the rules of the game for new and innovative technologies and we have defended many of your legislative proposals in this House, whilst at the same time weaving into them our strong conviction that the digital transition should leave nobody behind. **Ours is the only group to have focussed on the social dimension of the digital transition**, defending quality employment, avoiding a slide into precarity, in particular for platform workers, tackling the digital divide and ensuring full respect for fundamental rights. For the remainder of this term we will continue to strive in this vein, in particular to complete work on the platform workers and artificial intelligence directives, both led by S&D rapporteurs.

President von der Leyen, we also **acknowledge your Commission's efforts on gender equality and women's rights**. Our many shared achievements include new legislation on binding pay transparency as a major step towards the principle of equal pay for equal work, the long-awaited agreement on the Women on Boards Directive, led by an S&D negotiator, and the equally long-awaited ratification and accession of the EU to the Istanbul Convention, which represents a huge victory after so many years of campaigning. However, more remains to be done and we must make swift progress with negotiations on the directive on combatting violence against women and domestic violence, where the S&D Rapporteur will lead the fight to reach an agreement which includes criminalising rape and sexual assault in the EU and classifying all non-consensual sex as rape in law in every Member State. We will also continue to campaign for the extension of the EU list of crimes to include gender-based violence. **We look forward to hearing your explicit support for this during your speech.**

In the field of migration and asylum, it is clear that we must **move from crisis mode to a permanent and sustainable strategy to deal with migration flows according to our values, and not simply focused on external border controls and the externalisation of migration management to third countries**. This can only be done by developing **safe and legal pathways**, including humanitarian visas, which are the best way of avoiding loss of life. Recent shipwrecks in the Mediterranean have reinforced the need for a more proactive EU role in coordinating search and rescue operations, and we reiterate the Parliament's call for the establishment of an EU Search and Rescue mission. On the New Pact, much work remains to be done in the inter-institutional negotiations, in particular to ensure meaningful solidarity, in the form of relocation between Member States while fully protecting the individual right to asylum.

The S&D Group is proud to have been the driving force to uphold the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights, playing a pivotal role in establishing the conditionality Regulation. However, we need less talk and more action. We strongly regret the lack of progress in Poland and Hungary, as evidenced in the Commission's annual report, and we have increasing concerns about Greece. We urge your Commission to strictly apply the conditionality Regulation alongside all other instruments, especially in light of the Polish government's proposal for an 'investigative

committee' and Hungary's so called 'revenge law'. We also reiterate our call for a comprehensive, permanent and evidence-based EU-wide mechanism for the protection of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.

We are also proud of our joint work, making sure that common rules for companies operating within our internal market reinforce our environmental, social and human rights goals across the world. S&D lawmakers led the negotiations on the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, to ensure that companies are more transparent about their environmental and social footprints, and we are also leading the negotiations on Due Diligence, successfully achieving a more ambitious scope and content, which we hope the Commission will support during the interinstitutional negotiations, which we aim to finalise by the end of the mandate. We are also working intensively on the Forced Labour proposal, which was finally tabled after strenuous lobbying from our Group, and after being told many times that such a ban was not possible. Again, led by the S&D in Parliament, we will work to improve a solid proposal into one which is watertight, to make sure that no products made using forced labour can enter our market.

Linked to this, the S&D has been spearheading calls for including ambitious sustainable development chapters in all trade agreements for many years and we acknowledge that your Commission finally took up our demands, proposing for all future and modernised trade agreements ambitious sustainable development chapters, including sanctions as a last resort. **This paradigm shift will ensure trade is not conducted at the expense of workers and the environment.** The European Union will be all the more credible and reliable as a partner by concluding the important trade agreements it is negotiating in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, and stepping up its action in favour of countries hit the most by the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, food insecurity, and indebtedness globally. We urge the Commission to play its role as honest broker in finding solutions compatible with the Parliament's position during negotiations on the new Generalised System of Preferences, and for the swift signature and implementation of the post-Cotonou agreement. We also insist on more ambitious and effective action in order to make the EU's open strategic autonomy become a reality.

The S&D Group has been a reliable partner over the last four years, and we can truly say that our joint work has led this continent through multiple crises. We have taken giant leaps forward in terms of our climate ambition and environmental protection, and Europe is truly becoming a digital regulatory superpower in terms of setting the rules of the game. While we still need to see much greater reform of economic governance, tax fairness and fiscal rules to truly create a more modern, equal and progressive society, we are beginning to move in the right direction. Similarly, there remains much more to be done to achieve a social Europe in which citizens can trust and look to for protection, but we are making progress.

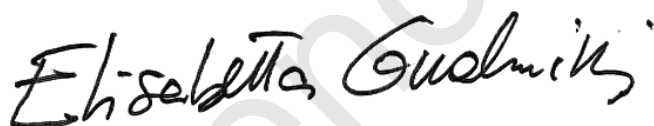
Of course, in order to continue addressing the challenges of today and tomorrow, a timely agreement on the package for the MFF revision is absolutely necessary. We count on your support and leadership in this effort to ensure a Union budget that is capable of responding to unforeseen events, meets current needs and promotes long-term investment. Such a budget can only be achieved if we continue pushing for genuine own resources.

Dear President, dear Ursula, just as our Group was instrumental at the beginning of this mandate in defining your agenda, please be assured that all Members of the S&D Group will work tirelessly between now and June next year. **Unlike others, we will stay true to our pro-European, progressive values and you can count on our continued support in fighting for a stronger, more sustainable Europe that leaves no one behind.**

Best wishes,



Iratxe García Pérez - S&D Group President



Elisabetta Gualmini - S&D Group Parliamentary Secretary