

## **Five points for reflection on the upcoming European elections in 2024.**

1. The promise of European unification was a war-free Europe. Not promised was a crisis-free Europe.

Today, war is back and crisis is permanent.

In these times, the first and foremost thing is to keep the European Union of states and peoples together.

We former Members of the European Parliament stand ready to do just that.

We are not campaigning for this or that result in the European election next year but simply for the highest turnout that will demonstrate that our Union bases on European citizens.

It is our Former Members experience which reminds us we did overcome crises and crises for almost half a century.

It is our self-confidence, with which reminds us we solved seemingly unsolvable problems despite all the gloomy prophecies and doubts.

History teaches us that there are times of progress and renewal.

And there are times of perseverance and preservation.

Keeping the Union united is more important than ever before.

2. The war in Ukraine confronts Europe with questions that it has not had to answer for almost 30 years:

The question of a common foreign policy, security and military defence and the question of an expansion of its competences beyond the scope of Maastricht and Lisbon treaties.

At the same time, our Union faces a new prospect of geographical enlargement to the east in terms of sovereignty and democracy.

The Union needs a rapid and far-reaching internal reform and a decision on when and in what form a country like Ukraine can join the Union.

The creation and the keeping of a strong, stable, and decision-making European Union takes precedence over its geographical enlargement.

3. Many people and leaders in the world and some in Europe consider our Union to be a liberalist and inefficient obsolete model.

Some Member States appear exhausted. The Union must fear exhaustion.

We are not allowed leaving our Union die of exhaustion.

Some want to reduce the Union to a mere single market or even a free trade area. They claim that this would make it more attractive to citizens again.

The truth is, a common market without a common policy on climate protection, without the euro, without cooperation on internal security and without military defence will not make the Union more popular, but more irrelevant.

We do not need a trivial Europe.

For us, former Members of the European Parliament, it is crystal clear: No inadequacy, no omission, no mistake is reason enough to let our Union disintegrate or to contribute to its destruction.

We continue to stand for the Europe of democracy, where an elected majority is ruling while remaining subject to the rule of law.

The nation state may exist without democracy. For the European Union, Democracy is existential.

Our European Parliament is not a copy of one of the national parliaments in Europe.

It should not try to become such a copy.

It is the freely elected parliament of the world's first project of transnational democracy.

There is no doubt about that. Let us be proud of it.

4. Our actual challenge is transition.

To a geographically larger Union, to climate protection, digitalisation with AI, military defence.

That means transition to global responsibility, global interest, and global influence.

In other words, our Union must change from a project of peace to a project of power.

In the middle of the last century, the aim was uniting Europe against the belligerent self-destruction of the European peoples.

Today, the aim is about keeping Europe together for our self-assertion in the world.

If we allow our Union to weaken and disintegrate, it will become a playing field for foreign powers.

If we allow the Union to drift, the Union surrenders.

The more globally the Union acts, the more European it must become and the more clearly it must show the world what it stands for:

The Union stands for the rule of democracy and the rule of law and for freedom against the impositions of autocracies and the threats from dictatorships.

If Europe allows itself to be dismantled, it will leave world history: First politically, then economically and finally also culturally.

According to all surveys in all member states, most Europeans want Europe to speak with one voice in the world.

We all do not necessarily have to sing all with one voice - nor do we all have to sing at the same volume.

But finally we must agree on the same text for what we want to say to the world.

A Europe that can no longer be heard in the world and that no longer wants to mean anything to the world is losing its Future, and even worse it will lose its soul.

5. Uniting Europe is not anti-national; after all, the European Union does not stem from another planet. Rather, it was created by nation states.

They then had the courage and the foresight to forge ahead on a historically new path.

Today we must have the courage and the foresight to keep our Union together despite all the crises and gloomy prophecies.

The union of the European states and peoples is not done, yet it is the best we have.

There is no other political creation in world history with comparable appeal and resilience as the European Union.

That is a great story.

Let us not be faint-hearted about it.

Let us be proud of it.

Our Union is much more than just the construction of a balanced set of common institutions and a market economy.

It is an ethos that sets an example to the world of the rule of democracy, and the rule of law, and the respect of human rights for all men and women.

Our Union is worth standing by it with a warm heart, a strong hand and a clear mind.