MANIFESTO

For the renewal of European Democracy BY GUY VERHOFSTADT

Europe is in crisis. From our persistent economic difficulties and the refugee crisis to the multiple terrorist attacks on European soil. **Europe always reacts too little, too late**.

A lack of leadership arises from a more fundamental problem: a European Parliament that is often reduced to following the Commission and the Council. We need to break with the uninspired 'grand coalition' that governed the Parliament for too long and instead become the main European policymaker. Citizens expect real solutions from us. This means, amongst other things, a sizeable border and coast guard, a European anti-terror capacity and renewed investments in our economy.

Let there be no misunderstanding; the Union of the future will not be a European superstate. It is in fact the opposite. A more effective and more integrated Union will better protect our cherished European diversity: in languages, in cultures, in traditions, in ways of life. **The Parliament must be at the forefront** of this.

1. STRENGTHENING THE PARLIAMENT

In 1953, it was already the plan of our founding fathers to establish a directly elected European Parliament with the right of initiative and full supervision over the executive branch and the budget.

Over the last few decades, the Parliament has gained additional powers, but never completed its journey. Therefore:

- i. The Parliament must be able to control the executive in a real way and on a permanent basis. It cannot be that the European Commission is elected for five years and thereafter simply acts outside real parliamentary accountability. It should become possible for this House to hold individual Commissioners to account.
- ii. The Parliament must acquire **full budgetary oversight**. The European Parliament currently controls expenditure, but has no say over revenue. The work of the High Level Group on Own Resources should lead to a European budget over which Parliament has full control.
- iii. We need **to upgrade the inquiry powers** of the European Parliament. Like any national Parliament, the European Parliament should be able to organise Inquiry Committees with real subpoena and investigation competences, a proposal currently blocked by the Council.
- iv. Finally, we need to start a reflection on **the future of the European Union** and our European democracy early on in the year. The Parliament has the ability to start such a process and it should take the lead.

To achieve this, the President of the Parliament must not only be an arbiter between groups, or a neutral spokesperson limited to managing speaking time. She or he must also represent the majority in this house and defend its stance with regard to the two other European institutions.

2. RENEWING THE EUROPEAN PROMISE

The European Union is seen by too many citizens as part of the problem, as part of the elite and a driver of uncontrolled globalisation. While in fact it should be the opposite. The European project should again become a democratic counterweight against the downsides of globalisation.

Therefore, the Parliament should in the coming years focus on a renewed socio-economic agenda:

- This agenda must contain **new legislation** on combatting tax havens, introducing a common European corporate tax base, reforming the governance of the single currency and reviving the European investment flow.
- ii. This agenda must also **defend European values** by establishing a new EU mechanism on democracy and the rule of law. This new mechanism must allow the European Union to intervene in a more precise and a more constructive manner against violations of European values in the Member States.
- iii. Finally, the European Parliament should communicate in simpler terms how and where it made a difference in trade deals and in foreign and security matters. Instead of simply publishing unreadable legal documents, we should point out that Europe is there to make international trade more equitable and the world a safer place.

3. RENEWAL OF THE INTERNAL GOVERNANCE OF THE PARLIAMENT

The Parliament's internal operations are in desperate need of reform:

- i. Parliament's administration should focus its administrative capacities more on **support for Members** in the legislative process. Therefore, the appointment of Parliament officials, primarily at top level, needs to be depoliticised.
- ii. The Parliament should strive for gender balance that ensures **greater equality** in the access to the jobs in the Parliament's administration as well as within the political structures.
- iii. The functioning of internal organs such as the Conference of Presidents (CoP), the Conference of Committee Chairs (CCC) and the Parliament's Bureau needs to be rethought. As a basic principle, **greater transparency** needs to be applied to their work and Members need to be better informed of their activities.
- iv. Finally, cooperation between the Conference of Presidents, the Conference of Committee Chairs and the rapporteurs should be enhanced. Because 'trilogues' need to be conducted with an overall strategy in mind: maximising the influence of Parliament in as many files as possible by linking them to each other. In the same spirit, Parliament must also fully use the powers that the ordinary legislative procedure provides: using the possibility of having three readings and putting an end to the overwhelming use of first reading agreements, which are often not transparent.