



**Progressives for strong European democracies with feminist values at heart
Adopted by the PES Presidency of 25 June 2021**

Gender equality is at the very heart of the European Union's values. Protecting and promoting women's human rights is the responsibility of the whole EU, including on national, regional and local level. Yet, still in 2021 women continue to experience discrimination in many forms, be it through unequal power structures, stereotypes, sexist behaviour, gender-based violence and gendered hate speech; or be it through unequal care burdens, economic, social and structural discrimination or through the denial of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. In order to change that and to achieve full gender equality, Europe needs strong, resilient and functioning democracies. Their quality is determined not only by the form of institutions, but also by the extent to which different social groups participate in these institutions. While women need democracy in order to thrive, the same holds true for democracy: for a system of government to be truly inclusive, representative, legitimate and resilient, it needs women at all its levels.

We, the PES Presidency members believe that the empowerment of women and the establishment of gender equality in this regard are crucial to our democracies. Gender equality and women's rights are indicators of how healthy and resilient our democracies are.

We underline the direct link between gender equality and promoting human's rights, the rule of law and democracy, which are mutually reinforced. Democratization and women's rights are closely intertwined and mutually dependent: the fate of our democracies is bound to the fate of women's rights and vice versa. We have seen this throughout the European integration process and can observe the key role women are playing in countries transitioning from authoritarianism to democracy. Therefore, we are deeply concerned by the growing anti-democratic, anti-rights and anti-feminist movements and governments within and beyond Europe, which are threatening the advancements progressive actors have carried forward. These actors systematically try to undermine progress on gender equality, silence and control women and relegate them to second-class citizens.

That is why we are reiterating our strong call for European democracies with human rights and feminist values at heart. We oppose any misuse of power against women and the LGBTIQ community and will continue to fight against any erosion of democratic principles and the rule of law.

We, the PES Presidency call for:

- Protection of women's rights, women rights defenders and efforts to strengthen women's voices and their participation in all levels of decision making bodies in parties, governments, public positions, judiciary and law enforcement institutions, the media, the private sector and civil society.
- Full implementation of the EU Gender Equality Strategy and LGBTIQ Equality Strategy spearheaded by EU Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli.
- Gender mainstreaming of all EU and national policies, including through gender-inclusive language in EU official documents. We oppose the worrying tendency of



conservative governments to water down or erase expressions like 'gender equality', 'gender' and even 'women' (who make up half of Europe's population) from Council conclusions or similar documents.

- Reversal of bans on comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education in school curricula and on gender studies at universities. Such bans are part of a broader antidemocratic agenda of educational control trying to prevent access to information and to suppress critical thinking.
- Independent judiciaries and appointment of judges, human rights ombudspersons etc. We strongly condemn politically biased and government-placed judges, as well as constitutional tribunals and supreme courts that purposefully undermine the EU's fundamental values. Whilst there must be democratic accountability of the judiciary, the appointment of judges must always be independent and free from any political influence.
- Making possible the recourse of the Article 7 procedure to monitor and ultimately sanction Member States if they breach EU values, as in the cases of Poland and Hungary.
- Gender budgeting as well as gender impact assessments and gender mainstreaming of the EU recovery financial package in order to foster gender equality. We call for mechanisms that prevent misuse of funds and oppose the redirection of recovery money to anti-human rights organisations at national level.
- Full application and monitoring of the rule of law conditionality mechanism designed to protect EU funds from misuse by EU governments that bend the rule of law in cases of corruption or fraud, but also fundamental EU values such as freedom, democracy, equality, and respect for human rights including the rights of minorities.
- EU accession to the Istanbul Convention to prevent violence against women and domestic violence, its full ratification and implementation in all Member States, and opposition to any misconceptions, smear campaigns or withdrawals from the Convention.
- Comprehensive measures to strengthen and protect citizens' rights in the digital area, including privacy, combatting hate speech, gendered disinformation, gender stereotypes and online gender-based violence.
- Measures to protect independent media and journalists online and offline. Democracy can only prosper when a plurality of voices is heard. However, the increase in online harassment of female journalists in Europe is currently threatening democracy and hindering free media from working effectively.
- We recognize the intersection between women's sexual and reproductive health and rights and fundamental human rights as well as access to universal public health services. We call for better regulations and transparency in lobby registers so that Europeans know in an open manner who is financing anti-choice organisations in the EU, whether they be from the EU or from third countries.
- Establishment of a formal ministerial Council configuration dealing with gender equality, diversity and anti-discrimination.
- Full gender-mainstreaming and parity representation in the debate about the Conference on the Future of Europe.