



European Liberalism for the 21st Century

And 12 Rules
to Make It Work

Abstract

The power of Europe has been growing proportionately to the strength and capacities of its citizens, its economies, and its institutions. Today, massive threats to security, freedom, and prosperity as well as the increasing complexity of modern reality underscore the renewed need for the liberal approach. By tracing the translation of liberal principles into practical solutions, this paper takes a reflective stance on how liberalism can empower Europe and its citizens to thrive in the rapidly transforming world.



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Introduction

For 80 years, the ever growing and expanding Union has been keeping its citizens safe and protected from the most devastating of human experiences: war. Positive side effects of peaceful coexistence and elimination of barriers were economic growth and expanding opportunities for people and communities. This allowed generations of Europeans to spend their lives overcoming the boundaries of what was possible or even imaginable for their parents and grandparents.

In 2024, the EU still delivers on its principal function, although in a much more hostile and complex global environment. Designed as an unprecedented peace project, it prevents internal wars among the Member States. However, is it able to cope with global conflicts – military, environmental, technological? As Francis Fukuyama’s ‘End of History’ seems ever farther away and the world is moving towards a ‘new global disorder’, can the EU remain the stronghold of liberal democracy and provide its citizens with the safety and prosperity to which they are accustomed? The age of uncertainty and ‘permacrisis’ thus poses principally new questions to the functioning of the European project and the living conditions of its citizens.

Politically, the liberal centre has been a powerful and steady force driving the EU through decades of growth, expansion, and integration. Today, when unprecedented crises are shattering the foundations of the continent, liberalism is even more critical to making Europe fit for the demands of a new era.

Massive threats to Europe’s security, freedom, and prosperity as well as the increasing complexity of modern reality underscore the renewed value of the liberal approach. Inherent liberal features – fundamental openness towards the future, embracing change and innovation, focus on empowerment and human creativity, bridging values and material concerns – are the necessary tools that can equip Europe and its citizens to succeed in the rapidly transforming world.

By tracing the translation of liberal principles into practical solutions, this paper takes a reflective stance on the ‘whats’, ‘whys’, and ‘hows’ of liberal leadership in shaping the Europe of tomorrow.¹

¹ This policy paper is based on the series of in-depth expert debates among academics and politicians organised by the European Liberal Forum within its ‘New European Liberalism’ project. The author expresses gratitude all the speakers, participants, and reviewers for their dedication and invaluable contribution.

Chapter 1

Where do we come from?

Driving force of Europe, or what is liberalism all about?

Properly understood, liberalism (is) a never-ending quest to find the best way for diverse people – and peoples – to live together well in conditions of freedom. (Garton Ash, 2020)

The European project is the liberal dream materialised. The winning philosophy of the twentieth century, liberalism has shaped the basis of the European way of life and mode of coexistence. Since the creation of the European Community, its principles have inspired the set-up of the united continent: from the cherished 'four freedoms' to the spirit of compromise and consensus.

Peace, liberty, and cooperation have brought unprecedented benefits to citizens: the supremacy of social justice, more fairness and equal opportunities, increased wealth, and expanded conditions for physical and social mobility, to name just a few.

The goal of liberals is to create the conditions for enabling the best while preventing the worst. While economic liberalism is a big part of the liberal political philosophy, opening borders and liberalising markets has never been the aim in itself. Instead, the purpose of the open market is to expand the prosperity and socio-economic opportunities of individuals and nations.

Human-centered liberal postulates come down to Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative: a man must be treated 'always as an end and never merely as a means'. The liberal understanding of community and solidarity stems from this principle. Contrary to a widespread stereotype, 'Liberal individualism does not preclude or deny human sociability; it simply means that most social engagements in a liberal society will ideally be voluntary' (Fukuyama, 2022: 45).

This principle, underscored by the rule of law, has made the EU a gravity point for young democracies aiming to join the peaceful European community with its free borders, where individual liberties and every person's dignity are safeguarded by law and by habit (Emerson, 2024). Ukraine's fight for freedom and a European future is the best although most dramatic proof of this.

‘Preserving what really matters’

Since the creation of the EU, liberal values and principles have become the gold standard – read: mainstream. This is the ultimate achievement to which a political philosophy can aspire. However, for the average European citizen, the actual meaning of liberalism has been lost in translation.

On the one hand, liberal values – freedom, justice, rule of law – seem too abstract and are increasingly taken for granted. On the other hand, liberal approaches seem dry and complex. Most importantly, to the external eye, the way in which the values are translated into policies appears as a black box. Liberal policymaking is not determined by a blueprint and thus takes various forms, granting liberalism different socio-cultural connotations and political agendas across the continent.

The very character of the European project reflects the core feature of liberalism as a political philosophy. The EU is not based on a predefined plan but takes its shape in response to challenges and practical needs as they arise.

This comes down to the nature of liberal philosophy. Unlike other political traditions, liberalism is not an ideology. Instead, it is a method: an open-ended, values-based ‘pragmatic philosophy that constantly adjusts itself in order to preserve what really matters’ (Bagehot, 2018). It is an approach of navigating through a changing reality by addressing real-life problems.

Interestingly, the very character of the *sui generis* European project reflects this feature. The EU is not based on a predefined plan but takes its shape in

response to challenges and practical needs as they arise. As a result, the Union, despite its complexity and against all odds, keeps delivering on its ever-expanding, often ad hoc functions: from mitigating the consequences of a pandemic to responding to geopolitical challenges or dealing with climate crisis.

Navigating through changes

Liberalism does not prescribe the future but shapes it on a case-by-case basis. It is precisely this absence of predefined specifics or rigid scripts that opens up space for endless opportunities. This is where new ideas and innovative solutions are born in response to emerging needs and practical concerns. **Embracing change and owning it – this is what has allowed liberalism to remain relevant for centuries.**

Liberals are pragmatic idealists – even maximalists – with regard to exploring, realising, and safeguarding the opportunities of the future. They are dedicated to what a free person, a free society, a free Europe can become – its achievements, its benefits, its unlimited potential. This allows liberalism to transcend current conditions and imagine a different, better future, without being constrained by ideological dogmas or prescriptions of the past. Hence the liberal emphasis on education, science, innovation and technology – the tools needed to embrace and shape the future rather than fear or resist it.

For the very same reason, liberalism, unlike any other philosophy, focuses on empowerment: providing people with opportunities to exercise their freedom and realise their potential and dreams, individually and collectively. It uniquely cherishes universal human values as much as material prosperity. Liberal policies thus allow people to improve their quality of life and care for their moral concerns. As a result of the decades-long implementation of liberal principles on the European scale, citizens and societies have been able to develop and realise both their material and ethical aspirations.

Chapter 2

Where are we now?

The age of uncertainty – and illiberty?

Today, after decades of flourishing, the EU and European liberal democracies are facing their greatest existential challenges since the end of the Second World War. Although various in nature and scope, they are closely interrelated and reinforce one another, determining the unprecedented complexity of the modern world.

At the beginning of 2024, the global socio-economic, security, and political context seems more dire than ever. The world in which most Europeans grew up and in which they believed appears to be shattered. Instead of stable peace, we are facing escalating wars; instead of prosperity – inflation and anxiety over the declining standard of living; instead of a flourishing liberal democracy – the rise of authoritarianism on a global scale (Smeltzer & Buyon, 2022), as 2024 proves to be ‘the biggest election year in history’ (The Economist, 2023).

In the increasingly interconnected world, we are facing an ‘everything, everywhere, all at once’ situation. The liberal world order is quickly moving towards a ‘new global disorder’ (Lavery & Schmid, 2021). Europe’s dominant geopolitical, economic, and cultural position is no longer acknowledged by default. Crises and challenges overlap and lead us into a state of so-called polycrisis or even permacrisis (ELF, 2023). Ongoing changes in geopolitical and geoeconomic relations are disrupting familiar ways of doing things, raising new dilemmas and conflicting priorities: between values and interests, long-term vision and immediate needs, the demands of different economic sectors and social groups (Tchakarova, 2024).

The political landscape across Europe is changing in front of our eyes. The current state of affairs is best characterised by what Timothy Garton Ash (2023) calls the meeting of the ‘two Europes’ – a Europe of liberals and a Europe of populists – fighting against each other in a historic battle for the continent’s future. Following their recent electoral gains, the far-right Eurosceptic leaders across the EU are shouting out to one another, proclaiming the ‘wind of change’, and announcing their ambition to rock the EU legislative scene (Schaart, Haeck, & Vela, 2023).

As a result, the 2024 European elections pose the risk – for the first time in the EU’s history – of shifting the balance of power from the centre to the right, with a strong far-right component (Cunningham & Hix, 2024). The European project ruled by the far right would be a contradiction in terms. Since 85 per cent of European legislation is decided jointly by the European Parliament and the Council, illiberal consolidation on the EU level might set the continent back miles while the world races ahead at unseen speed. Climate protection, EU enlargement, support for Ukraine, migration – these are the pressing issues that will be the first victims of extremist-influenced decision-making.

Citizens’ search for comfort and hope

Yet the rise of the far right is not only a problem in itself. It also points to the growing social dissatisfaction and political distrust of an increasing number of people.

The salience of the recent crises varies significantly among the EU Member States and across segments of society (Krastev & Leonard, 2024). However, the shocks have also provided insights into what really matters to Europeans and mobilises them.

On the human level, prolonged material and psychological discomfort have fuelled a growing sense of fear and unease about the future. Europeans are

preoccupied with the threats to their stability, security, and comfort. The declining standard of living has shattered the entire concept and worldview of the shrinking middle class, with its fundamental belief in hard work and its accumulative socio-economic pay-off.

In the context of uncertainty and danger, the collective sense of insecurity puts freedom at great risk, setting in motion a vicious circle of anti-liberty. It is only when freedom is taken away that people realise that it was the most precious thing they have

As a result, attention to post-material values gives way to pragmatic 'kitchen table' concerns. Since the state of crisis now seems permanent, the prospects for future generations look grim (Morrissey, 2024). Stability starts to feel a lot like luxury, and confidence and future optimism change to the feelings of insecurity, confusion, and frustration.

This creates fertile ground for the rise of populists, radicals, and autocrats. They exploit popular discontent by promising protection: 'the burden of personal responsibility opens the door to leaders who promise to make our choices for us'

(Galston, 2020). In the context of uncertainty and danger, the collective sense of insecurity puts freedom at great risk, setting in motion a vicious circle of anti-liberty. It is only when freedom is taken away that people realise that it was the most precious thing they have (See Koczanowicz, 2023).

At the same time, as the European response to Russian aggression has shown, it is not only fear and anger but also a sense of solidarity and a search for unity and belonging that are driving the agenda. Shared concerns about external threats revitalise the 'European spirit' behind what is known – and often criticised – as 'technocratic' EU policymaking (Nadjivan & Sustala, 2023).

Now more than ever people need a renewed sense of security, hope, and shared purpose. They need a vision of the future that addresses current threats but also makes sacrifices and temporary discomfort feel meaningful and justified. Necessary measures are unavoidable, and sometimes they come at the price of unpopular decisions, yet at the very least people need to understand the end goal behind them.

From challenges to opportunities

Today, all the three golden pillars of liberalism (Fukuyama, 2022: 5) have acquired a renewed relevance: pragmatic (regulating violence and ensuring peace), moral (protecting human dignity and individual freedom of choice), and economic (promoting economic growth). The only way to continue benefitting from the European project and liberal democracy is to adjust liberal principles to current realities – and make them deliver during the upcoming turbulent decades.

Since liberalism and the EU evolve in response to crises, every challenge becomes an opportunity. For the EU it is an occasion to become stronger and provide greater benefits to citizens. For liberalism itself, it is a chance to demonstrate yet again how its 'abstract' principles provide the most practical and systemic solutions.

The upcoming legislative term represents a historical match point that will determine Europe's course: will the EU move towards the future or slip into a reactionary backwardness? Unlike the populists, liberals do not promise citizens paradise or salvation. Yet they can promise to shape a strong and sure basis for the free and prosperous Europe of tomorrow.

Chapter 3

Where are we going?

Liberal agenda: Security, freedom, prosperity

Eight decades after its founding, the European project is far from being completed, its benefits are far from being exhausted or even fully explored. However, as the world has changed, the EU needs to change, too.

Europeans are used to a Europe that is shaped by liberal principles: a Europe that is safe, flourishing, and independent enough to maintain a high quality of life while living up to its post-material ambitions. Given the chaos of the current reality, this is by no means a given, nor will it continue by default. On the contrary, it requires the breaking of the institutional inertia and departure from the outdated patterns and practices.

Amid the accumulating changes, 'back to normal' is a utopian idea. The only way to move forward is by facing the new world and adapting to it by 'preserving what really matters': freedom, security, quality of life – and collective future-optimism. **The ultimate generational task for modern European liberalism is thus to embrace the changing reality and empower Europe and its citizens to deal with it.**

Addressing the complexity

The liberal agenda for the upcoming years and decades provides solutions to the unprecedented challenges to Europe's peace, prosperity, and environment. **As liberals do not offer the impossible nor wishful thinking, what do they offer? Security needs to be defended, prosperity needs to be generated, sustainability needs to be mainstreamed.**

The building blocks of a free and stable future for the continent are: advanced and integrated defence capabilities; a globally competitive, innovation-based economy; a highly skilled, creative workforce; and a realistic, comprehensive sustainability vision that takes into account the needs of citizens and industry alike. How do we make this a reality?

The unprecedented challenges to Europe's peace, prosperity, and environment determine the liberal agenda for the upcoming years and decades. It is based on the three pillars: security as the basis, quality of life as the goal, sustainability as the approach.

None of these issues can be effectively tackled in isolation from one another or by a single government. Thus far, the EU has faced all the major crises addressed above with new instruments and large-scale European approaches. However, the complexity of the current situation puts the conversation on a whole new level (Zuleeg, 2023).

The challenges of inflation, climate change, global wars, migration and aging population at the same time, rising authoritarianism, and conflicts over critical resources are all closely interconnected processes. Prioritising one crisis while

dismissing the others – or rather ignoring the multi-layered nature of the permacrisis situation as such – will only cause further turmoil and instability.

Today's complex problems require systemic unity, long-term strategy, and innovative solutions. It is only the liberal approach that can provide adequately comprehensive answers to the complexity of modern challenges and create a resilient basis for further growth and development.

Unity as a matter of security

The profound transformations of the twenty-first century underscore the fundamentals of what has made Europe strong: unity. The continent is facing harsh global competition and security threats, and only together can Europeans succeed.

While global demographic trends play against Europe, joining forces with like-minded people inside and outside the EU to protect common values and interests is essential – not just for progress and growth but for survival. Peace and prosperity can only be guaranteed by further integration of the continent, making the widening and deepening of the EU a matter of utmost security (Jones, 2024).

In the modern globalised and interdependent world, none of the EU countries alone is big or mighty enough to be a geopolitical power on its own. Therefore, the possibilities for pan-European coordination need to be fully explored and optimised (in particular through the reform of the EU institutional framework (Renew Europe Group, 2023)). The principle ‘united in diversity’ – or, possibly, ‘united in pluralism’ – acquires an existential tone (Nadjivan & Sustala, 2023). Unity is a matter of safeguarding the collective freedom that Europe has benefited from in recent decades.

Liberal cosmopolitanism is not a contradiction to the national or other affiliations but an all-encompassing human universalism that embraces various identities and standpoints within it. In contrast, the greatest threat coming from the populists consists not only in their simplistic explanations of reality but, above all, in their divisive narratives. Their promise to protect people from the changing world by ‘bringing the power back home’ only undermines the internal stability and international credibility of the EU, the sole viable framework for preserving Europe’s security, global influence, and competitiveness.

Politically, a strong liberal center is the only way to secure the power of responsible and competent decision-making in times when Europe needs it most. With the increasing fragmentation of the European political landscape, in times of chaotic changes and intensified power struggles, liberals’ coalition-building and consolidating capacity becomes indispensable (Maftean, 2023). On the European level, the centrist liberal group is decisive for a strong pro-EU coalition and keeping the divisive far-right out of setting the agenda or blocking the legislative process.

Europe in the changing world: open, strategic, autonomous

Today's liberal world needs a strong and free Europe more than ever before. But only by relying firmly on its own forces can it act from its principles and interests, instead of responding to the conditions imposed by others.

In the globalised world transformed by technologies, climate change, and geopolitical as well as geoeconomic shifts, Open Strategic Autonomy is an integral liberal strategy for shaping Europe's long-term future (Cappelletti and Pogorel, 2024).

This approach is based on the liberal principles of both self-reliance and cooperation. It consists in empowering and strengthening Europe's citizens, industries, and capabilities, providing them with the necessary conditions to realise their full potential and generate the resources they need to live the life they want.

However, Open Strategic Autonomy is neither protectionism nor a defensive retreat into self-isolation. On the contrary, it aims to enable a confident, secure openness to cooperation with the rest of the world – both with like-minded partners and with systemic rivals (Clingendael, 2022). The more opportunities and resources that are generated within Europe itself, the more selective and more productive the Union's cooperation with the world will be.

Embracing the future: the power of innovation

Balancing between the conflicting urgencies, demands, and priorities of the permacrisis is by far the most complex and systemic task the European project has faced since its very founding. Within the EU-level strategy, there is not, and cannot be, a one-size-fits-all policy blueprint – only well-functioning guiding principles, methods that will need to be calibrated and fine-tuned case by case, considering the specifics of the national and local levels within the member states.

To advance this comprehensive agenda, Europe will need to explore out-of-the-box, innovative solutions, based on human creativity as well as the most advanced technologies. **This is where the power of liberalism is at its best: embracing change and paving the way towards the future by unleashing the potential of existing and yet-to-be-discovered instruments.**

Employing AI to increase economic growth and productivity to help us beat inflation in the long run (Manyika & Spense, 2023)? Building trust in nuclear

power and financing the net-zero economy to bolster our energy security (The Economist, 2022)? Exploring gene editing and cyber farming to set up sustainable agriculture and healthy food systems for the future (van Kasteren, 2023)?

Apart from enabling all this, the instruments of the digital revolution may also be crucial to safeguard our most important critical infrastructure – our democracies: by making our institutions smarter, our democratic processes smoother, and our information space more transparent and fact-based.

What does liberalism mean for Europeans?

Finally – and most importantly, in times of insecurity and psychological discomfort, liberals can bring people together – not around collective frustration or fear but around a constructive joint objective: to build a decent life for everyone, from both the material and immaterial points of view.

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On the one hand, **there is no real security or prosperity without freedom.** As our democracies and freedoms are threatened from the outside as well as from within, ensuring the efficiency and

trustworthiness of the fundamental democratic institutions – from the rule of law to the freedom of media – is a matter of the highest priority for the liberal agenda on the national and European levels.

On the other hand, democracy can only be sustained by free – meaning independent and self-reliant – individuals. On the policy level, this comes down to providing all citizens with the necessary conditions to provide for themselves, choose for themselves, and stand on their own two feet with strength and confidence. This is also the basis of the liberal understanding of solidarity: self-reliant citizens are much better equipped to contribute to society and help others than people who are themselves dependent on support.

Today, when living standards, psychological comfort, and a sense of security are being seriously challenged, no one should be abandoned as a victim of the shocks and turbulence of the ongoing crises. Instead, they should be provided with opportunities to recalibrate and adapt to the changing socio-economic reality.

Access to quality education and vocational training, effective re- and upskilling, next generation policies, support to small and medium enterprises, a flourishing social economy, and social entrepreneurship are the liberal answers to the social challenges (Alesina, 2021). Investing in local capacities, business, and industries not only increases Europe's global competitiveness but also immediately improves the well-being and independence of its citizens.

Bridging fundamental values and material interests through empowerment – rather than mere support or paternalistic protection – preserves the true control in the hands of citizens. This lets Europeans choose their future and see it materialising for them, their families, communities, and nations.

Conclusions

Equipping Europe for the new world

The principles of liberalism have been driving Europe for many thriving decades. In 2024, we cannot afford the luxury of taking liberalism for granted or underestimating its visionary yet pragmatic potential. When unprecedented crises are hitting the continent and the future looks gloomy, liberals can unite people around optimistic yet practical and realistic solutions.

Europe's free and prosperous future needs to have a solid and sure material basis constructed in alignment with the human-centric liberal values. Citizens' concerns about the growing security threats, decreasing welfare, and uncertainty about the future constitute the core of the liberal agenda.

Reconciling the conflicting priorities and demands of security, competitiveness, and sustainability is a challenge in itself. The need for a comprehensive, long-term and coordinated strategy is the greatest challenge in the history of the EU. As always, it is also an opportunity to go beyond the limits of what was previously thought possible. The open-ended character and innovative spirit

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of the liberal thought allows for facing the changes and realising a yet-to-be-discovered constructive potential of new circumstances and developments.

The power of Europe has been growing proportionately to the strength and capacities of its citizens, its economies, and its institutions. It is imperative for the EU to invest in its own capacities and become more strategic in its interaction with the rest of the world. The liberal principles of self-reliance, empowerment, and cooperation will guide the policies on securing Europe's safety, boosting its economy and global competitiveness, and meeting its sustainability targets. At the same time, the guiding principle

of autonomy and strategic partnerships must be underpinned by solidarity and pan-European unity – across nations, across the political spectrum and among citizens.

Today, there is no need to invent an imaginary enemy, an antagonistic 'other', because there is no shortage of real ones. Russia's attack on Ukraine was a wake-up call and a point of no return. The safety and welfare of a free Europe cannot depend on the will of illiberal leaders, both from outside and inside the EU. A strong liberal center is indispensable for advancing a responsible and comprehensive pro-EU agenda that benefits Europeans and defends their freedoms and interests, collectively and individually.

In line with the fundamental human-centered postulates, the primary concern of a liberal Europe has always been its citizens. It is the quality of their lives and their prospects for the future that constitute the driver and the end goal behind the big-picture liberal vision for the continent's future. **The liberal promise to citizens is therefore to preserve 'what really matters' – and move into the future with confidence.**

The world of yesterday is rapidly becoming the world of tomorrow. Contrary to the instinct to shrink and retreat, Europe and Europeans need to expand, learn, and move ahead. Experiments will be costly, so evidence-based, knowledge-driven solutions are required. Liberals' human-centered principles and future-oriented outlook have delivered security, freedom, and prosperity in the middle of the twentieth century – and they will deliver again in the twenty-first.

Twelve Rules

to Ensure that Liberalism Prevails in the Twenty-First Century

By Prof Dr Julio Crespo-MacLennan

Liberalism emerged in the nineteenth century as a reaction to dogmatism and authoritarianism. At present, authoritarianism is rapidly expanding with the support of the great powers. Dogmatism under the socialist agenda is making headway in Europe and the Western world. Individuals cannot be free if they are poor, miserable, and under-educated, but they will never enjoy freedom if the means to create wealth are under close government supervision, their welfare depends on an unsustainable state, and their education is based on indoctrination and controlled by a thought police. The 12 rules presented here will allow liberalism to prevail in an increasingly illiberal world.

1

Strengthen the liberal international order

The promotion of ideas and models of society is inextricably linked to geopolitics. It is obvious that liberalism will be stronger if liberal democracies are hegemonic in the world than if China, Russia, and other authoritarian regimes exercise this hegemony. For this reason liberal democracies must cooperate among themselves to defend the liberal international order. Neither the nationalist right nor the left has the moral authority and credibility to do this. The former has little interest in cooperation, while the latter is often a victim of its cooperation with the illiberal extreme left. This is evident in Latin America, where liberal democracy has either disappeared or is under siege. The way in which the United States, the European Union, and the other democracies have supported Ukraine against the Russian invasion is a good example of how the liberal international order must be defended. It must also be defended beyond its borders.

2

Defend the legacy of the Western world

Western civilisation has made the most important contributions of any civilisation to progress, human rights, and collective welfare. Liberal democracy is a Western invention. It is therefore not possible to be a liberal and at the same time feel ashamed of the legacy of the Western world. At present there is an undeclared war against the West led by authoritarian regimes and supported by the left that eagerly blames the West for everything and even attempts to rewrite history by obliterating its major representatives. Liberals must show pride in the legacy of the West, with self-criticism when necessary, but also remembering that it has

been in the Western world where the highest levels of freedom, tolerance, and prosperity have been reached.

3

Respect the pillars of liberal democracy and serve them with the highest standards

Liberal democracy can only work if its pillars are respected, such as the division of powers, including an independent judiciary. The simplistic idea that democracy is merely majority rule must therefore be rejected. It has led to the degeneration of democracy into ochlocracy, or rule by the mob, and kakistocracy, or government by the least suitable or competent citizens of a state. In contrast, liberalism must be represented by politicians with solid professional backgrounds and integrity, people who go into politics to contribute to public life rather than to obtain personal benefits from it.

4

Support globalisation based on reciprocal interests

Globalisation has become the scapegoat for all the evils associated with the last global financial crisis. Liberals must remind society that the wealth, prosperity, and freedom of movement that they enjoy is the result of globalisation and would be jeopardised with the return to closed markets. Nevertheless, a new form of globalisation must be promoted based on reciprocity between nations and made compatible with the needs of national working communities.

5

Promote free enterprise

European countries desperately need to create wealth. Plans for promoting equality, wealth distribution, and the fight against poverty are proliferating, particularly in countries with socialist governments, but genuine plans to foster economic growth are increasingly rare. Liberals must promote free enterprise as the basis for wealth creation. A nation is genuinely wealthy when its people enjoy economic prosperity and contribute to it. Job opportunities driven by market forces are essential. The digital revolution must be used to create new job opportunities rather than taking away jobs through automation.

6

Offer a sustainable welfare state

States have grown at the cost of reaching record levels of indebtedness and making the welfare state, one of the great achievements of European society, unsustainable. While the left is in denial of this fact, liberals must offer a credible plan that will make the welfare state sustainable or propose a reform of the system. They should appeal to individual responsibility and solidarity between

generations against the nanny state and reject the idea of social justice, by which people are treated unequally in order to make them equal, as well as the culture of subsidies.

7

Defend freedom of speech

Freedom of speech is an inalienable principle of democratic society. This is incompatible with the imposition of political correctness, by which those who do not hold so-called progressive ideas are censored. Freedom of expression must be defended in all spheres, and government plans to indoctrinate citizens must be resisted. Historic memory laws are a very good example of dogmatism imposed from above. Those who are persecuted or ostracised for expressing their views should be defended.

8

Promote education and culture

Standards of education are declining, as is knowledge of cultural heritage. This explains the moral degradation suffered in societies that are generally governed by poorly educated people. Liberals must endorse education and culture as the basis of a free and prosperous society, and advocate meritocracy by supporting equality of opportunity but at the same time creating a culture of excellence. Collective mediocrity based on the principle that education is a right must be resisted.

9

Stand up for individual liberty against old and new threats

Individual liberty is the essence of liberalism. It must be defended against both state supervision and artificial intelligence, which will increasingly undermine free will. Liberals should promote what the philosopher Isaiah Berlin described as negative liberty – leaving individuals to do what they like provided they do not interfere with others – rather than positive liberty, the socialist concept which aims at state intervention to create the necessary conditions for freedom. They must also defend private property, which is inextricably linked to the liberty of individuals who have worked to own their property but is increasingly threatened by taxation, squatters, and crime.

10

Promote community values

The combination of individual liberty, job creation, family, and human interaction leads to healthy communities. Liberalism must prove that individualism does not mean turning one's back to the community. The nationalist right has grown wherever communities have been abandoned and their values undermined.

There is a concept of community based on traditional human values and solidarity which is healthier than a community dependent on government subsidies and subject to state surveillance, which is what the left is promoting.

11

Preserve the environment and the rural world

In the same way that nationalism is identified with the right, protection of the environment is identified with the left. Under the threat of global warming, liberals must espouse the environmental cause, but unlike the left it must offer market-oriented solutions to preserve the environment. It must also support the rural world, which has been forgotten and has become marginal in most advanced Western societies, where an urban culture predominates.

12

Defend and promote an open society

Open societies are a major achievement of the Western world. Liberals must promote a society in which all individuals are respected, which implies majority rule but always respecting minorities. Societies must be open to those willing to live according to their laws and values. But in order to preserve an open society, liberals must defend it against its enemies: those who use democracy to put an end to democracy. They should stand up for Western values and culture rather than multiculturalism, in which anti-Western values are allowed to undermine the West.

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The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 56 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen. ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European. We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different EU stakeholders.

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