

**Press release**

**Speech**

by

**Martin Schulz**, Party Chairman,

At the extraordinary SPD party conference

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Comrades, friends, guests! Welcome to the Social Democratic Party of Germany's extraordinary party conference, at which we want to adopt our government programme for the next legislative period. It is a government programme that we have all worked on. We discussed this programme at all levels – passionately, and at times our debates were very heated. We have worked hard for two years so that today, we can adopt a programme that contains the very best policy approaches for our country and its future.

Let me tell you – I am proud of our work and I am grateful to everyone who invested a great deal of work, strength and commitment in this process. I think that we will adopt a programme that we can be proud of.

Before we adopt the programme, however, I would like to tell you a story, comrades. It is the story of asymmetrical demobilisation. In 2009, a well-known pollster gave Angela Merkel a piece of strategic advice: "Don't say anything. Don't take a stance on anything. Don't commit to any concrete position." I must admit, it was a successful strategy.

Whilst we social democrats present policy proposals and take stances in all election campaigns, whilst we engage in public debates and discussion with our ideas, the other side remains silent – “Angela Merkel is there, that’s enough”. It was a successful model in 2009, and again in 2013 – but not in 2017!

I am not telling this story simply by chance, the story of asymmetrical demobilisation. I am well aware of why I am telling it. Everyone should be fully aware of the implication when a centre of government, the headquarters of a governing party systematically decides to refuse to debate a country’s future, when it says: We’ll willingly accept the fact that people are not voting. On the contrary: “Let’s encourage this fall in voter turnout, because we know that declining voter participation has a negative impact on the others”.

When the headquarters of a party and a centre of government systematically and intentionally encourages falling voter turnout as a campaign tactic, then in Berlin they may call it asymmetrical demobilisation, I call it an attack on democracy.

Comrades, delegates, thank you for coming in such vast numbers, for we have 6,000 guests today, all of whom are ready to fight his election campaign with commitment, passion and strength. Since January, 20,000 people have joined the SPD. 20,000! The last time such a wave of new members joined was in 1998. The people who have joined us come from all of the regions in our country, they come from all groups of the population and from all generations.

Many of them are engaging in politics for the first time, keen to work with all of us to get things moving, people who overcame any doubts they may have had and decided to go for it with all their heart, saying: I’m in! For many of them it is their first SPD party conference here in Halls of Westphalia. I would like to wish you a particularly warm welcome, new comrades!

But why have so many joined us now, to get involved and work with us? I think it is because they, like all of us, sense that there is a profound reason to get to work now, to join us in our efforts now. An epochal change is taking place and we can all sense it.

Which issues characterise this change? What is this change comprised of? First of all, we have the question of how we can draw on innovative technological and economic advancements to bring about social progress. Secondly, how can we ensure social cohesion in a time of rapid change, how do we create security amid this change whilst also guaranteeing justice. Thirdly, and I believe this to be key, we have the question of our continent's destiny. It is about how we strengthen our democratic Europe. It is about how we guarantee peace in a world in which peace is at risk.

Comrades, many people are grappling with these three large issues. And in view of these issues, many people want to become involved. Many have seen that a better future will not come about on its own. And they have chosen the social democrats. For our task has always been to safeguard people's dignity in times of great upheaval, to shape progress and to make sure that the human being, the individual person, every man, woman and child is placed at the heart of this change and this progress. That – safeguarding human dignity as progress takes place – is the mission of social democracy, it is the SPD's mission.

During the period of industrialisation, our party stood up to the untamed forces of capitalism. But such untamed forces continue to exert an effect in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, today their impact is global. These forces destroy the environment. They speculate unscrupulously on the stock markets, for example on food. For they know that food shortages drive up prices for foodstuffs. This leads to some people's hunger serving another people's profit. What a perverse system we have to stand up to!

They sell weapons and accept the fact that their ruthless exploitation destabilises entire regions. They willingly accept wars, crises and hunger as consequences of their action.

The People's Republic of China participates in this global development as much as the United States of America and, unfortunately, we Europeans as well. This kind of policy leads to migratory flows that will not stop, that are inhumane and that turn the Mediterranean into a mass grave. The power of maximising profit with no regard for the consequences is destroying human dignity.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the task incumbent upon social democracy is to civilise these forces. Our task is to tackle this change.

Our task is to address this change, accept that it is happening and make it a positive development.

Our fundamental values of freedom, justice and solidarity will serve as our compass as we do so. It is specifically because the world is moving faster, because it is changing from day to day, that we are standing by these fundamental values. Yes, sometimes people tell us that this is a bit old fashioned and somewhat antiquated. But no, quite the opposite, in a changing world, these basic values of freedom, justice and solidarity give us strength, direction and hope. Anyone who today tries to get by without a compass will lose their bearings. And if a person loses their bearings, they lose their future. But the CDU and the CSU want to muddle through. We have a different programme that we will be adopting today!

In our time, we are facing a huge challenge in digitalisation. It is changing nearly all areas of our society, our lives and our daily routines. It will determine how we live. It already determines how we communicate. It will determine how we work, how we do business, how we shape freedom and democracy. We must all be clear about the fact that digitalisation is a political matter.

Our aspiration must be to make sure that the technical progress brought by digitalisation also translates into social progress. Our aim must be to set limits where developments take the wrong direction, where unhindered commercialisation and also totalitarian trends undermine our social model, where people are objectified, made into data providers with ears.

However, our aim must also be to seize the opportunities offered by digitalisation, opportunities for emancipation, participation and social advancement.

In recent months, I have spoken to many creatives and I repeatedly heard them say: if you want digital start-ups in Germany to be successful then we need nothing less than a culture change in our country. If we engage with it in the right way, then digitalisation helps create new, well-paid and decent jobs. Then it helps people to better reconcile their family and work lives. Then it helps us to improve our healthcare system. Then it helps us to better connect cities and the countryside through better mobility. Then it helps us to create new opportunities for education.

But we do not want to focus solely on what is technically possible or even on what generates the highest profit. No, also in this field, we want to place people and individuals, each and every one of us at the heart of the change.

That is why I am so grateful to the unions, to the many committed colleagues active on works councils, who are currently engaging intensively in the debate about digitalisation and who are helping to move things in the right direction. For innovation is born most often in companies. We thus need to give employees a greater and not smaller say, for we want to show that it is possible to have a modern welfare state that can succeed in the digital age, too. And that is why it is wonderful that the whole leadership of German unions is with us, led by Reiner Hoffmann.

So, innovation is born in companies. But in the digital age we need big initiatives. Our programme embodies this spirit of shaping the future by investing in it. We want to bring IT education to schools, vocational schools and ongoing training. We are thus going to ensure that our state infrastructure is no longer pushed to breaking point by efforts to save money; rather we will make sure that the investments needed are finally ploughed into our schools having proper buildings and modern equipment, enough teachers and sufficient social workers.

We want surpluses to be used at long last. We will use them to invest in infrastructure, research and development. Yes, let's be that ambitious! By 2025, we want Germany's infrastructure to be one of the most cutting edge in the world – in cities as much as in small and mid-sized towns and in the countryside. We do not want this as an end in itself, everyone here knows that we must invest for a very simple reason: having a high-speed network is the key issue for Germany's future. Anyone who does not invest in creating such infrastructures is squandering the Federal Republic's future.

In a nutshell, in Germany and in Europe, we need to resolutely commit to a sustainable growth strategy, to an innovative industrial policy and above all we need to strengthen small and medium-sized enterprises. For small and medium-sized enterprises generate the most jobs. We need the right framework conditions for courageous entrepreneurs who dare to take a risk with their business ideas!

Comrades, let me add something at this point. When it comes to starting businesses, we can also learn something from the United States of America. We need more courage. In the United States, a clear principle made Silicon Valley strong. It is the concept of: have an idea, give it a go, succeed – great. Have an idea, succeed, fail – get on with the next idea.

What about here? Have an idea, give it a go, succeed – great. Have an idea, succeed, fail – then you are usually finished for good.

You do not always have to, but sometimes you can learn something from the United States, with the aim to be more willing to take risks and to encourage young men and

women to dare to take risks. We must help them do so. That is the culture change that we need.

We are acting with determination. We are acting now. We are investing in our country. That is why our fiscal policy is a financial plan with the funding volume that we need. We will not settle with muddling through as the Union does, and we will not surrender at every objection. We want the young generation, which Johanna Uekermann spoke on behalf of here, to have the same opportunities to live a free, safe and prosperous life that the generations before it had.

Comrades, I make something very clear: anyone who does not invest today, who today does not think that investing is the only way for us to remain powerful and strong, but who wants to distribute our billion-euro surpluses to the very rich in the form of tax cuts surely has anything but justice in mind. Above all, that person has missed one thing; it is only fair for the next generation to be able to rely on the current generation. I want our children and their children to know that offering them a good future is our top priority. It is our duty to do so.

The second biggest challenge of our era is to hold our society together at a time of rapid change, to create security amid change and guarantee fairness. Here, too, we can all sense a profound shift taking place. The idea of our welfare state is to link civil liberties with social citizenship. Citizens can trust that the state will guarantee their ability to live their lives freely, and that their country is a fair place.

For social democrats, freedom and justice are intrinsically linked. They are the prerequisites for the social progress that our country so desperately needs. But, comrades, progress needs trust!

Trust in the fact that what you can do counts for more than where you are from!

Trust in the fact that our children's prospects do not depend on their parents' wallets and contacts. Or, as it happens, their address when they go to an interview.

Trust that there is reliable insurance against major life risks such as illness, old age or unemployment. That there is a healthcare system that treats people equally and does not make one person wait a month for a doctor's appointment whilst another is seen straight away simply because they have different insurance. We are going to replace this injustice with a new system.

Trust that women have the same social and employment opportunities as men.

Trust that people have equal opportunities in life whether they live in a city or the countryside.

Trust that cultural diversity is a strength and not a threat.

This trust, comrades, is necessary to maintain solidarity in our country and hold it together.

We are fighting for this trust. We are campaigning for this trust. But anyone who wants to gain this trust must acknowledge that it has been lost. It is often lost because people sense that our society does not respect people's personal life achievements. There is a pre-requisite to people trusting in a society, in a state, and that is a sense of belonging, a sense of being included in developments, a certainty that one will be accepted by the community.

That describes a feeling that people often no longer have – a feeling of respect.

In recent months, I have come across countless people who are doing well, who say, I'm getting on. Somehow everything is ok. But no one is interested in my destiny or the fate of my children. You all know the discussions that take place amongst groups of friends, in companies, in associations, this lack of respect which is killing trust.

The surgeon who carries out heart transplants and saves lives receives our respect, our admiration and our recognition. But the bus driver who takes our children to school every morning, who is entrusted with perhaps 80 children in their bus, who also protects lives, deserves just as much respect from society. Yet he needs to feel that he belongs to this society and that what he does in life is respected.

It is when respect is once again brought to the forefront that we will regain trust. I am telling you, that is more important to us as the Social Democratic Party than to any other party. People have to know that they can trust us, because we are the party that respects their life's work and places them at the heart of our policies.

But this very model, comrades, the model of this state governed by respect and mutual trust, the state described in article 20 of our Basic Law as a social and democratic state under the rule of law, is coming under attack ever more often nowadays.

This trust has become fragile – and not only in our country. We are seeing this trend in many European Union countries and overseas as well. The populists of this world are taking advantage of it. In Italy, led by Mr Salvini, the Le Pens, this million-euro family enterprise of xenophobia and racism, Mr Haider's heirs in Austria, led by Mr Strache and the dreadful Mr Wilders in the Netherlands. They want an autocratic, an undemocratic system.

And as we are talking about autocrats, at this point let me welcome again Can Dündar, as well as the representatives of our sister parties the CHP and HDP. And at this point I would not only like to welcome them, I would like to make a gesture of solidarity by telling them that we are here at your side. You represent the democratic Turkey that we want.

It is scandalous that thousands of opposition members are being persecuted and attacked in Turkey, and it is scandalous that countless journalists are languishing in Turkish prisons.

Here in Dortmund at our party conference, comrades, I am therefore directing these two comments at the Turkish president, who is claiming for himself all the very same freedom rights in our country that he denies his own people in his own country. The first thing one must say and call upon this president to do is: return to the democratic path that you were once on! And secondly, very clearly and topically, at this party conference again as a gesture of solidarity with the oppressed journalists who are suffering from the restricted freedom of expression in Turkey: Mr Erdogan, release these people, and preferably, do so today!

Comrades, we also have such people amongst us, representatives of so-called illiberal democracy. They live in our country, too, and are active here. If you read the AfD's online forum in Saxony Anhalt you can see how they speak. It is interesting, you should look at it. They talk of "Germany for the Germans", of a "necessary takeover of power". There people mouth off about the "anti-popular media" and "expansion of external borders".

If you needed more proof that the AfD is in reality a 'light' version of the NPD, that is it.

These people do not belong in our modern Germany. Our modern, enlightened Germany is a place for other people who we can and must be proud of, for example, Lamyia Kaddor, a brave Muslim woman, one of the greatest thinkers in our country at the present time, Navid Kermani, the great director Fatih Akin, my friend Ranga Yogeshwar or the brave journalist Dunja Hayali or Jérôme Boateng, who plays for the national football team and who won the World Cup for us. These people belong in our modern and enlightened Germany.

And then an AfD party nominee wades in and dares attack this German football world champion, Jérôme Boateng, by saying that no one would want Mr Boateng as their neighbour!



No, everyone, there is no place for this party in Germany. Let us mobilise all our strength and achieve something historical, namely let's accomplish something, and by the way, if you mobilise and do not demobilise politically then you can accomplish something, you can stop these people from gaining a seat in the German Bundestag. Now that is an aim worth fighting for!

Comrades, I am standing with my party and with our party programme for performance to be fairly recognised, for the daily work of millions of people to be acknowledged. I mean the people who work hard in our country, who abide by the rules of our country, the performers who throw themselves into their work, their family lives, who also get involved in volunteer work and hold our society together.

It is often women who ensure that things run smoothly. And despite this we still see women being put at a disadvantage, systematically. In her opening speech, Manuela Schwesig noted that the right, enshrined in the coalition agreement, for women return from part-time to full-time work and the legal entitlement to this could not be implemented by us because the CDU and CSU – led by the Federal Chancellor and Mr Seehofer – blocked it.

We are still seeing, and I think it is scandalous, one of the greatest forms of discrimination out there, comrades, women receiving less pay for the same work as men.

So, I have a clear call – we need equal pay for equal work, for women and men. I am telling you: we will ensure that this will be implemented. This discrimination must be eliminated.

That also goes for excesses on the labour market, which arise from the flood of temporary contracts. No one forced to cling on from one contract extension to the next can make plans for their professional or personal future. So, we must do everything possible to return to a situation in which permanent contracts, paid according to collectively agreed pay scales and with good working conditions, become the norm once again.

For otherwise we will not be able to build a secure future for the next generation. The performers I am talking about are often people in the middle of their lives, men and women aged from their mid-thirties to mid-fifties. An incredible number of demands are placed on this middle generation. They have to bear an unbelievable amount at the same time: “Be successful at work. Have a few children. And, please, make sure you raise them very carefully. At the same time look after your elderly parents. Ideally, build a house and, please, volunteer in your free time. And don't forget to exercise three times a week.” This constitutes many people's daily lives, and they are

often reaching the end of their tether. Quality of life often falls by the wayside whilst people are simply keeping going.

We will unburden these people for doing so is a matter of fairness. Of course, and I want to point out, the state cannot remove every single burden, that is not something we can promise. We cannot remove every hurdle from the path, of course not. Raising children is and remains one of life's greatest challenges, we all know that. We cannot take away the sleepless nights, worries and responsibility for children that parents have.

But it is time for employees and families to be unburdened and for them to receive the support they deserve. We therefore also want children to have free care and education from the first year of their lives up to their higher education degrees, we want to make the path from day-care to university free of charge.

Allow me to add one thing, this free education should not only apply from the first year of their lives, from day-care to university, but also for a master craftsman's certificate. That is part of the matter too, and I want to say this very clearly here, for a very simple reason: people who gain a vocational trade qualification, who sit their master craftsman exam, who go through our dual apprenticeship system – which by the way is envied around the world – are, and saying this is a matter of respect, just as good as academics. Let's say that loud and clear! That is why our party manifesto includes master craftsman's certificates in our free education programme.

And because we want to unburden families, we will introduce a legal entitlement to full-day care in primary schools. We will introduce family leave so that families can once again spend time together and so people can look after their relatives.

We are thus also presenting a fiscal system that will unburden low and middle-income families. With our fiscal policy, we are keeping room for manoeuvre for the investment we need in our future, the investment I have described, and also for a fairer system, because strong shoulders have to carry more weight. And let me say something in response to comments I read in newspapers: of course it is also a question of fair distribution for strong shoulders to bear more weight than weak ones.

And for me, this fairness also means that employees and employers should once again make equal contributions to insurance schemes – fifty/fifty! These measures for justice will benefit citizens at the heart of their daily lives.

Guests! Comrades! We do not only want to strengthen families comprised of a father, mother and child. In any situation in which people take on responsibility for one another, they are a family. That includes all ways of life that people choose. And that

includes homosexual couples. So here is a clear statement to everyone: we will introduce marriage for all in the next government. I will not sign any coalition agreement that does not guarantee marriage for all.

And if I am talking about fairness in our every-day lives, then I am also talking about security – social security and, comrades, in very concrete terms, security against crime. Security against crime is a fundamentally social democratic matter. For security is a fundamental promise made by a democratic state under the rule of law – it cannot be a luxury that the rich are able to buy. There must be security for all citizens. That is why it is such an important topic for us social democrats.

Safe and vibrant cities and communities also mean home and quality of life. And of course, series of burglaries and car thefts in the affluent areas outside the large cities and in border regions – I myself live in such a place – are events that we should all be concerned about. Just as much as violence in so-called difficult neighbourhoods and public transport is unacceptable.

But I want to give you another reason for why security policy is indeed a fundamental social democratic principle when we are talking about respect and solidarity: because we owe the victims of crime respect and solidarity. We often focus on the perpetrators. Yes, I want perpetrators to be brought to justice under the rule of law. But I also want to make sure that we don't forget about the victims and that they receive the solidarity that they need in this society. The two things belong together!

If I say that people need to be able to trust that the state will keep them safe, it does not only mean tightening up a handful of sanctions in the criminal code. The conservatives are always quick to call for new and harsher laws. It is a reflex response. The only problem is that real security is not created by the ink on the federal law gazette. Comrades, real security is created with clear statements. So, I also want to be frank when talking about our country's criminal laws:

We must say one thing to all those who do not want to understand it – because they do not accept our constitutional state and seek to undermine it – that this is a dam strong and self-confident democracy! That goes for old Nazis, new Nazis, it goes for Islamist terrorists and it goes for all other manner of extremists. Anyone who believes that they can question our fundamental rights under the veil of whatever political belief or form of religion will find a resolute opponent in our country in the SPD. Our democracy is capable of defending itself.

But to do so we need a strong and visible police force that is closely connected to the people. At this point, allow me to extend my thanks to the officers who are protecting our party conference here and who share our hope that nothing untoward will happen. I am the son of a policeman. And so, I want to say this to police officers on behalf of our party but also on a very personal note, that I know what having to work shifts means and what it means for a family. The men and women in our police force have millions of hours of unclaimed overtime under their belts.

It is therefore wrong to cut police jobs. We need more police officers. And we have said so in our programme. But I want to say something else to all officers and members of the police: we know how much you are doing. We know, how difficult it is to be subject to frequent physical attack and even more frequent verbal abuse, having to swallow things, and we know the psychological burden that this often places on us. Yes, we know about the difficult service that the men and women of our police force provide, people who very often serve to protect our democracy, too. At this party conference, I would like to extend a special thanks to them.

If, comrades, we talk about justice, then we are also talking about respect for the older generation, who built up our country and enabled us to prosper. And that is why the question of how we handle retirement is so important to me. That is why I asked that we take a lot of time and draft a credible policy; for people must be able to rely on their long-term investment in their pension, otherwise the system will not work.

We have thus put forward a good, fully-costed policy with our dual stop line. We are stabilising current pensions whilst at the same time ensuring that young people will not be burdened with a disproportionately high bill.

To us another thing is clear: we are going to stick with the current regulations on retirement age. The retirement age at 70 that the Union is calling for will not happen with us.

But why, comrades, is the Union refusing to outline its retirement policy? The answer is clear, after the election, internal fighting would break out within the Union over how high we can make the age of retirement – 70? Perhaps a few more years? And an

argument over how far you can cut pensions – to 43%? Perhaps a few tiny percentage points lower?

What I am hearing from the Union is that we should “keep pension policy out of the election campaign”. The pension debate supposedly has no place in the election campaign. No, colleagues! We will not allow you to get that one past us! On the contrary, retirement policy is a central issue when it comes to justice.

We want to discuss a new inter-generational contract. In concrete terms, that means that we must make sure there is a balance between generations so that on the one hand people can grow old in dignity, but that the young generation – I have explained how they are burdened – on the other hand is not brought to their knees.

That must be seen as a task for all of society and we must all discuss the best way to achieve it. If a party then comes along and says that it has got nothing to do with us, we will not discuss the matter in the election campaign, it shows nothing other than the fact that power has made them arrogant, comrades.

We are presenting a policy. Everyone knows what it looks like. Anyone who wants to buy a pig in a poke can vote for the CDU. Anyone who wants a secure and stable pension would be best put to place their tick next to us.

Comrades, some of today’s generation of pensioners can still remember the post-war years, when Europe lay on the ground, destroyed by a fanatic war and will of war. It was European unity that got our continent back on its feet. That is why the third challenge that I want to talk about is nothing less than a question of destiny. The question of how we can strengthen a democratic Europe, how we can secure peace in a world in which peace is threatened.

We are no longer living in the time of the Cold War. We are no longer dealing with two blocks; the bipolar world is gone. Neither the murderers of the so-called Islamic State nor the North-Korean dictator or globally-connected cyber terrorists can be cowed by nuclear deterrence. But at the same time, it is clear that the causes of

conflicts and challenges such as poverty, drought, flight and displacement, such as epidemics or famine will not be cured with bigger armies.

The only way to bring about stability and security in the regions affected is through more economic, social and political development. The world does not need more weapons, it needs more justice and it needs more development opportunities! That is what we as social democrats stand for.

Despite this we are witnesses to a form of new global arms race. The world spent a whopping 1.7 trillion dollars on the military in 2016 alone. That is the incredible figure of 1,700 billion dollars! But even that amount is not enough for some, the US president wants to spend even more money on armament, is calling for more. He advocates that within a few years, Germany doubles its defence budget to nearly 70 billion euros!

That would result in a heavily-armed military power in Germany, a Germany, surrounded by friends, that arms itself to the teeth in the middle of Europe. I am asking you, is that what we want? If we have learnt anything from our history it is that more weapons do not offer more security.

Let me be clear, the Federal Armed Forces need to be better equipped than they currently are; we are in no doubt that we need to do this. Twelve years of CDU/CSU policies have continuously degraded the Bundeswehr's material equipment. Every year the Bundeswehr is given a new mandate. But from Mr von und zu Guttenberg to Ms von der Leyen the game has always been the same, a new "von" arrived but the Bundeswehr still saw cuts.

Therefore, I am saying that we must take the work of the Bundeswehr seriously. We must respect the soldiers of the Bundeswehr. And respecting them does not mean placing them all under a blanket of suspicion. That is something else we must protect the men and women of the Federal Armed Force from. And we must bolster the Bundeswehr's budget by several billion. But we must not equip the Bundeswehr to be the biggest army on the continent.

Mrs Merkel says the following about this: "The time in which we could rely on others is somewhat over." I heard what she said as much as you did. I let it sink in, and it

resonated globally. “The time in which we could rely on others is somewhat over.” What extent does “somewhat” imply? Who are the others? And, please, just how vague are we going to be here?

You could also have said, we do not know if we can still rely on the United States of America. But we are all very aware that we cannot rely on an erratic President Donald Trump and that is not something we realised at the latest NATO summit or G7 summit in Taormina. And you could have said that we are not prepared to kowtow to Trump’s theory of armament but that we must decide things for ourselves.

Yes, that is 100% correct. But if that is 100% correct, why must we say: “The time in which we could rely on others is somewhat over”? Why not be clear?

For example, you could be as clear as Gerhard Schröder was when he told a US president – who compared with the incumbent is almost a liberal – when he used clear German to tell a president who ordered a war of aggression contrary to international law: “Not with us”. By doing so he wrote a glorious chapter in Germany’s history.

I would like to add that in an article by the then opposition leader published in the Washington Post, she said: “Mr Schröder does not speak for all Germans”.

Comrades, a peaceful Europe means a democratic, enlightened, tolerant Europe, the Europe that Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand fought for, the Europe of the Maastricht Treaty, that established a new order in our continent following the establishment of German unity and that was led by the thought that Thomas Mann described so brilliantly and that Helmut Kohl took on as his leitmotiv: We want a European Germany and not a German Europe. The fact that, following the restoration of the unity of the German state, he embedded this Germany in an integrated Europe that cooperates intensively across borders is Helmut Kohl’s great achievement.

But this Europe is facing new problems. Today, tolerance and openness to the world are being questioned within its governments. For example, Viktor Orbán’s government in Budapest, who coined the term “illiberal democracy”, whatever that is supposed to mean. Or the government in Warsaw, whose first action in office was to

challenge the independence of the constitutional court and attack the freedom of the media.

For years, both as president of the European Parliament and as chairman of our party, I have deplored these developments. I have addressed them in countless European councils, but have never been supported by the head of the Federal Republic of Germany. Led by her guiding ethos of “democracy that conforms to the markets”, Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble never wavered when it came to pushing through their harsh economic demands, which I add often took the greatest toll on the poorest of the poor in other countries.

But when it came to defending the rule of law and democracy within the European Union, you heard little or nothing from them.

A great deal of trust in Europe has been squandered in recent years, that much is clear. Who still believes that there can be a change of course in Europe under this kind of leadership? Just a few days ago, the new French president clearly said that the European Union is not a supermarket in which everyone can get what they want. Macron said: we have shared values which everyone should uphold. The man has been in office for two months. The top echelons of the German government have remained silent on all these issues for 12 years.

On the other hand, Viktor Orbán who I mentioned was guest of honour at the CSU party conference’s closed-door meeting. No one, I tell you, has lambasted Germany’s refugee policy more than him. “We are building a fence around our country” is what Orbán said. But I am not surprised that Viktor Orbán was the CSU’s guest of honour. For the chairman of the CSU described our country’s refugee policy as the “rule of injustice”.

Following three and a half years of no common ground, the CDU and CSU have met in a beer tent for a so-called reconciliation summit. My gosh! It was indeed a summit, I must say, a summit of hypocrisy.

So, in the parliamentary election, everyone should be clear about the fact that anyone who votes for Angela Merkel will ultimately get Horst Seehofer.



Comrades, I have very often said that things cannot continue like this in Europe. We cannot have a few states who, when talking about funding for the agricultural policy or the resources for structural support, say yes please to solidarity, or who, when it comes to the sanctions against Russia that they are calling for because they feel threatened, demand solidarity and say yes please to sanctions, but who say no thanks to showing solidarity for others when it comes to refugee policy. Who say no thanks when it comes to clearly protecting or committing to our founding values of tolerance, freedom and the rule of law.

In that case these states need to be clearly told, I have been doing this for years, and thank god Emmanuel Macron has now done so, too, that solidarity is not a one-way street! In contrast to Mrs Merkel and Mr Seehofer we are saying that in clear German.

We stand on Europe's side, a Europe that is democratic, tolerant and open to the world, that places the value of solidarity and the commitment to democracy at its heart. We want to reform Europe to this end. We want to make it a Europe that is not based on democracy that conforms to the markets but that is a community of democracies that shapes a market with human dignity at its centre. Comrades, that is the Europe we must be working for. And we want to fight for this Europe.

Guests, comrades, I have spoken about the great issues of our time: our economic future, justice, Europe and peace. We social democrats have the right programme, and we take a clear stance towards these big challenges. We know, what we stand for. What do the others stand for?

The SPD stands for modern policies, that combine fairness and economic success. The CDU and CSU, if they say anything at all about this issue, tend to play these two things off against one another.

The SPD stands for policies that ensure cohesion especially in times of change, for secure pensions, for better educational opportunities and for fair pay. The CDU and CSU remain silent, believing that nothing in these areas should change.

The SPD stands for policies that support mothers and fathers in their efforts to work as a team and reconcile their professional and family lives. The CDU and CSU persist with their traditional vision of roles.

The SPD advocates diversity, tolerance, culture and solidarity. The CDU and CSU repeatedly drive wedges in society, through either their scaremongering or drivel about mainstream culture.

The SPD knows that people do not want the state to be shoved in their faces, but do want it to be by their side when it matters. In our uncertain times, the SPD is championing peaceful conflict resolution and disarmament. The CDU and CSU are advocating armament.

Comrades, Germany is facing a fork in the road in this decision. Yes, we have the chance to decide what kind of country and what kind of society we want to live in: we want to continue to live in a country where there is freedom, solidarity and diversity, a country embedded in a strong, revitalised Europe. A country that believes in itself and believes that the best has yet to come. A confident, open, optimistic country to whom the future brings not threats but promise. A country that trusts in its potential and own strength. A country that is prepared to try new approaches and opt for a fresh start. A land of courage, progress and solidarity.

Shall we set the course for the future and get going in reforming our country? Shall we plan a route towards the future or continue following our noses? We think that the time has come. The time has come for more justice. The time has come for an innovative future. The time has come for a new Europe.

Our comrades who called for a united states of Europe at their party conference in 1925 in Heidelberg were heavily influenced by the First World War, and they issued their call eight years before Hitler seized power in an utterly tumultuous world.

I do not know, perhaps we and all of Europe would have been spared the Second World War's utter break with all civilisation if this spirit had prevailed when they called for a united states of Europe.

Once again, we are living in a time of great upheaval, in which the values that we social democrats have fought for, Europe's values, the values of an enlightened, tolerant society are coming under greater threat than they have done for decades. We live in times of profound change, in which Europe must tackle the great challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Europe must grapple with:

Overcoming climate change, a duty of today's generation towards the next generation.

The advent of a digital age in which we must create a European Google and a European Facebook. The next Bill Gates must be a European. And the fundamental values that we have fought for must be upheld by a strong Europe.

Europe must get to grips with the question of how to shape our economic cooperation with the poorest regions in the world, for we will only be able to find sustainable ways of managing the challenges posed by migration and flight if we give the poorest countries a chance; through fair trade. And on a foundation of mutual respect.

But above all, through a European immigration law that we so urgently need. We need this immigration law, comrades, so that we can finally replace a system of despair and mass loss of life with a system of hope and fair access to Europe.

Europe must find ways of combating international terrorism. Above all, this includes putting prevention first in all European countries. But Europe must also limit arms exports, for the wars are being waged with our weapons.

And these weapons, comrades, often fall into the hands of terrorists. It is already clear to us, however, that it does not help if a country opts out because the attitude this is met with is all too often: well, if they are not exporting then we will gain a bit of market share. That is why Europe can only do this if we act as a whole. But then Europe must start taking on responsibility for the matter of ensuring that peace is safeguarded and global disarmament takes place. Gerhard Schröder pointed this out in his speech.

As social democrats in Germany we have a long tradition of adopting an alternative approach to that of simple spirals of armament that so many try to talk us into. An alternative to this so-called 2 percent target of upgrading NATO member states' armies for them to become well-equipped and heavily-armed units, double the size that they are today. This 2 percent target is not sensible and it goes against our tradition. Our tradition follows the footsteps of Brandt and Schmidt in advocating disarmament and policies limiting armament. Europe should do so too.

It should be a Europe that creates an open, diverse and tolerant society. Article 1 of our Basic Law also defines the introduction to the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights: "Human dignity is inviolable". That is the most important statement in my and all of our political work. Everything that we do, be it at the national or European level, must be led by this duty to ensure the human dignity is never infringed upon.

This idea is the idea behind Europe: to create a Europe that places human dignity at its heart through transnational democracy and cooperation between peoples and states across borders. We social democrats have defended this idea in Europe for over 100 years.

This idea was expressed in the 1925 Heidelberg Programme, following the end of the First World War. The men and women at the party conference could not know what lay ahead of them. But even unaware of the demonic events that were soon to unfold, they decided that they wanted a united states of Europe.

And now once again we are in a period of upheaval. Europe now needs to be re-established as a place of freedom, a place of security, a place under the rule of law, a place of enlightenment and of human rights, of disarmament and progress of civilisations, transforming the rampant forces of the economy in the digital age into social progress. These are the tasks facing Europe and they are the tasks of social democracy. That is what we stand for, today more than ever.

I believe deeply in this idea, comrades. I do not need any strategic advisors or spin doctors to convince me. And I did not come up with the idea in a beer tent with Horst Seehofer. I have fought for this idea my entire life.

This is an idea worth going out to the streets to defend. It is an idea for which it will pay off to ensure that the next Federal Government is led by the social democrats and is a government that brings this idea to life and implements it.

Comrades, many of the ideas I have presented here today are worth campaigning for. But this last idea is one worthy of fighting for with all your heart and soul. That is what I want to do. And I need you to do so. It is for this idea that I want to become Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.