



DEMOKRATESCH
PARTEI

EUROPA.

STÄRKEN, WAT EIS SCHÜTZT.

Election programme 2024-2029



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FOREWORD

The European Union has been a guarantor of **peace, stability and prosperity** for decades. Its value led approach aims to enable people to live in personal freedom and social security.

But times have become more turbulent in recent years – in Europe and around the world. We are confronted with **social upheaval, climate change and geostrategic risks**.

We can only overcome these major challenges if we **tackle the problems together in Europe!** Only together as Europeans can we solve the tasks that one state cannot tackle alone. This is especially true for our small country in the heart of Europe: Luxembourg is strong when Europe is strong.

To achieve this, we need a European Union that is **self confident, resilient and, above all, capable of taking action**. We must strengthen the EU and its institutions now: for a life in peace and freedom, with prosperity and social security. There is no time to lose!

Europa. Stärken, wat eis schützt.

That is what we stand for, that is what the Democratic Party stands for.



GUSTY
GRAAS

JANA
DEGROTT

CHARLES
GOERENS

AMELA
SKENDEROVIĆ

NANCY
BRAUN

CHRISTOS
FLOROS

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I. The exceptional context

From 2019 to 2024, various European and world events have had a profound impact on the life of the European Union and, consequently, on that of our country as a Member State. As a result, the EU finds itself today in a situation the likes of which it has never known, facing considerable difficulties and challenges for its future.

"Stop telling us what we want" read one of the placards at one of the largest pro-European demonstrations in the history of the European Union. Today is 23 March 2019. The demonstration in London, attended by an impressive number of young people, was no longer able to call Brexit into question. The die had been cast: a few months later, the United Kingdom would leave the European Union. The certainty that the EU could never be stripped of one of its Member States was shattered. Through lies and the manipulation of public opinion, the detractors of European integration had achieved their goal. The Brexit marked the start of this parliamentary term, which comes to an end in a few months' time.

On 16 November 2019, just a few days after the von der Leyen Commission took office, the SARS-CoV-2 made headlines for the first time. At the end of 2019, no one knows that we are on the eve of a catastrophe that will impact the whole world in health, social, political, economic, social, financial, and budgetary terms. When the virus begins to ravage millions of people, the famous "whatever it takes" approach becomes the rule of conduct for the budgetary policy of our Member States. People's freedom of movement was curtailed, a curfew was imposed, and most schools remained closed. Global supply chains are disrupted, industrial production is falling, and our economies are in recession.

In the early hours of 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine on the pretext of fighting the so-called Nazis in what it called a "special military operation". The master of the Kremlin used NATO's alleged desire to expand eastwards as a pretext. In fact, Putin was not afraid of NATO's expansion, but above all the expansion of democracy. On 5 April of the same year, the massacres of civilians by the Russian army in Boutcha signalled the return of barbarism to the heart of Europe. In the meantime, Moscow's war rhetoric shied away from nothing, not even the nuclear threat. The Twenty-Seven agreed on a dozen packages of sanctions against Russia. NATO is preparing to welcome Finland and Sweden, which have decided to end their neutrality.

Climate change and biodiversity loss, which were already on the EU's agenda long before the start of this parliamentary term, will remain there for many years to come. The Green Deal, announced in 2019 by the Commission, aims to turn the commitments made in the Paris agreement on climate change into reality. At the same time, the United Nations has informed us that, in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, additional investments of the order of 4,200 billion dollars per year will have to be mobilised on a global scale.

A very brief retrospective of the last five years reminds us just how unpredictable the future has become. While the climate catastrophe was already on everyone's minds well before 2019, the COVID-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine have shown us just how hazardous it has become to make reliable forecasts, even in the very short term.

Today, humanity is facing existential crises that are, so to speak, all of human origin. Faced with all these challenges, we are committed to an approach that aims to mobilise, beyond our political family, all the forces likely to help ease tensions and bring together the majorities essential to confirming our democratic values and finding effective solutions to the problems that threaten our very existence.

The European Parliament's Research Service has just published the fifteen main risks that are likely to challenge the European Union in the near future. These risks include:

- Russia's attempts to destabilise Europe,
- China's aggressive policy towards Taiwan,
- the exploitation of illegal immigration at Europe's borders,
- climate change and the loss or collapse of biodiversity,
- an increase in infections due to antimicrobial resistance,
- insecurity of energy supply,
- a rapid increase in sovereign debt in Europe, ...

The list could also have included the reversal of US security policy. For the Twenty-Seven, it is now, if not the end of transatlantic solidarity, at least the end of transatlantic solidarity at an advantageous rate for Europeans. The Republican candidate for the presidency of the United States, by announcing his intention to give up defending European countries whose defence effort he deems insufficient, is plunging the Atlantic Alliance into a crisis of confidence from which it will not recover any time soon. This declaration, which comes at the worst possible time for Europeans, puts an end to the illusion of a united and supportive West, ready to join forces to counter attempts by hostile powers to destabilise our states. Hence the increased importance of a strong European political, economic, and military union!

II. The principles

Article 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon enshrines the principle that human dignity is irreducible. Our Union is founded on "the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities". Over the last ten years, the rule of law has been undermined to such an extent that Hungary and Poland in particular have called into question their respect for fundamental values.

Respect for the irreducibility of human dignity is the basis of the European Union's action. All the Member States have subscribed to it, some when they ratified the Treaties, others when they joined the European Union by complying with the Copenhagen criteria.

This applies first and foremost to respect for fundamental values. These are defined in Article 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon, while Article 7 defines the sanction to be applied to a Member State that deviates from them. In principle, a Member State that violates fundamental rights may be deprived of its right to vote in the Council. However, the sanction can only be applied if twenty-six states so decide. We want to see an end to the unanimity rule and for the sanction applicable to a state accused of failing to respect fundamental values to be decided by qualified majority.

The principle of the "*ever closer union*" is, in fact, no longer of interest only to historians. It resurfaced when the United Kingdom was preparing to leave the EU, only to be forgotten again. It is clear that in many Member States, the desire to strengthen the Union in areas as vital as foreign policy, defence and solidarity in welcoming migrants has given way to indifference and inward-looking attitudes. It is important to refocus the political debate on the adjustments that need to be made to the way the EU works. The EU needs to improve its decision-making mechanisms in order to ward off the often existential dangers which, if we are not careful, could threaten the very existence of the European Union. And this especially before welcoming new members.

In 2022, the European Parliament denounced the "disintegration of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights in Hungary", turning the country into a hybrid electoral autocracy. In the meantime, a mechanism for making European funding conditional on the rule of law has been in force since 1 January 2021.

This mechanism authorises the European Commission to block the payment of funds to a Member State accused of mismanagement of European funds or even of wider abuses of the rule of law and violations of the EU's fundamental values. The conditionality mechanism is an undeniable step forward in the fight against violations of our values.

The fact remains that another provision, namely the deprivation of voting rights in the Council, which makes it possible to sanction a Member State, remains ineffective in the current state of the Treaty of Lisbon. Article 7 of the Treaty stipulates that such sanctions must be taken unanimously by Member States other than the offending State. As it is highly unlikely that all the Member States will adopt the same position on this issue, Article 7 remains, so to speak, ineffective.

The **principle of healthy and undistorted competition** governs the single market. This principle is not an end in itself, but is intended to guarantee fair treatment for all the economic players involved. In the event of a serious crisis, however, derogations from the above principle may be justified on a temporary basis. Without the injection of hundreds of billions of euros into European companies, whole swathes of the European economy, including many systemic sectors, would have been devastated by the COVID-19 crisis and more particularly by the interruption of supply chains. The European Union has reacted well by siding with the victims of the crisis.

It is undeniable that at the most dramatic moments of the economic downturn, the Commission gave Member States a great deal of latitude when it came to granting State aid to companies whose very existence was threatened. While the seriousness of the crisis between 2020 and 2022 has justified the derogations from the principle of healthy and undistorted competition, maintaining these exceptional measures would nevertheless be highly detrimental to the European economy, and first and foremost to businesses based in small and medium-sized EU Member States.

As for the EU's trade policy, this is increasingly coming under fire in view of the failure of our trade partnerships to comply with the commitments entered into by 196 countries as part of the Paris climate agreement. On the one hand, the EU, anxious to comply with the imperatives of the fight against climate change, is imposing drastic reductions in the number of livestock on farms. On the other hand, the same European Union is granting fairly substantial beef and sheep export quotas to its partners under recently negotiated agreements. It is therefore important for the EU to pay greater attention to the principle of policy coherence.

III. The method

Over the years, the composition of the European Parliament has changed profoundly. A marked increase in the representation of delegations that tolerate Nazis in their ranks has led political groups that uphold the fundamental values of the Union to refrain from any form of cooperation with these extremists. This is why maintaining a **cordon sanitaire** around these political groups remains fully justified.

A second cause for concern is the trend towards radicalisation within the coalition bloc formed by the three largest forces in the European Parliament. The legendary spirit of compromise has given way to more strained relations between the major groups and sometimes within them. It was during the work on implementing the Green Deal that the first major differences emerged. Positions hardened particularly during discussions on legislation to restore nature and reduce the use of pesticides in agriculture. Increasingly partisan attitudes on both sides are casting doubt on the EU's ability to transpose the commitments enshrined in the Paris climate agreements into European legislation. In order to prevent a systemic inability of Europe's co-legislators to fulfil their mission, it is important to learn the real lessons from recent failures. On closer examination, it is not so much the aims of the Green Deal, for example, that diverge as the feasibility of the measures in practice.

The first step is to calm things down. The next step would be to rebuild trust between the responsible political groups. To this end, the Commission, the Council and the Parliament will have to do the necessary soul-searching if they are to regain the trust of the citizens affected by European regulations. Many reforms have not been sufficiently discussed with professionals as to their feasibility before being put into practice. As a result, hasty and poorly understood reforms have often been compromised reforms. In our view, the Commission, Parliament and Council should agree on **a one-year moratorium on new administrative burdens**, during which time a reduction in the burden of bureaucracy should be examined and proposed.

IV. The DP's proposals for the European elections

In the light of the above observations, the DP defines its political priorities for tomorrow's Europe in the following areas:

1. Our economic and social priorities

1.1 An economy at the service of citizens

The DP is working for a competitive, resilient and sustainable economy that creates jobs. The disruptions to supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic have alerted us to the EU's high degree of dependence in key sectors of its economy. Caught between Chinese dumping and American protectionism, the EU will clearly have to rely on itself. This does not mean that it is defenceless in the face of the ruthless competition from China and the United States. To remain a leading economy, the EU must succeed in the dual challenge of ecological and digital transition. To achieve this, the EU needs to mobilise substantial financial resources. At present, it still has an investment capacity of €1,100 billion up to 2027. This amount is spread across a number of very well-endowed European funds, more specifically the Post-Covid Recovery Fund and the Regional Fund. It has to be said, however, that these possibilities are largely under-utilised. It is therefore important to facilitate access to these funds in order to boost initiatives likely to keep Europe at the forefront of the ecological and digital transition. Given the low absorption capacity of the Member States, it should be possible to reallocate part of the resources available to the regional fund to the ecological transition.

From this point of view, we need to make unprecedented efforts in the production of renewable energies to be able, in the long term, to move more quickly away from dependence on fossil fuels.

There can be no question of Europe in future not having access to essential medicines because they are produced elsewhere. However, it is an illusion to believe that the European Union could repatriate all the activities relocated to China overnight. To this end, to cite just one example, it would be judicious, in order to ensure the supply of our pharmacies, to create strategic reserves of medicines in Europe that could prevent shortages on the European continent. However, it is an illusion to want to repatriate all the giants of the medical products and pharmaceutical industries.

Gone are the days of cheap gas, negative interest rates on loans and the benevolence of the United States towards Europe in terms of defence. The EU finds itself alone in this unprecedented situation.

In addition, the increase in public deficits from 2020 has significantly limited the capacity of EU Member States to intervene in the economy. With public finances at the end of their

tether, limited budgetary capacity and a more than worrying trend in terms of territorial, economic and, by extension, social security, the EU has the historic task of putting the free part of our continent back on its feet. This new perspective is leading us to redefine our priorities.

For the EU to succeed, it is important to create an administrative, fiscal and economic environment that is competitive, and to encourage all economic players on a global scale to respect unreservedly the conditions essential to saving our planet.

Our priorities are to

- **Comply with** the obligations set out in **the Paris Climate Agreement** and implement the commitments set out in the Green Deal;
- **Preserve a multilateral framework** that respects the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO);
- Be determined to defend our position at the forefront of **trade**;
- **Re-industrialising Europe** to reduce its structural dependence in such important areas of the future as batteries, micro-processors, pharmaceuticals, and artificial intelligence. Re-industrialising Europe in no way means repatriating all the companies that have relocated to Asia over the past decades. On the contrary, it means laying the foundations in Europe for the economy of the future, from 2035 to 2050.

The development of microprocessor production in the EU is just one example among many that reindustrialisation is already beginning to take shape in our countries. However, the EU must ask itself whether its choices in terms of industrial strategy are ambitious enough. At a time when the US economy is taking off spectacularly, thanks in particular to its Inflation Reduction Act, the EU, less bold, is threatened with recession;

- To provide the EU with an economic, fiscal, social and administrative environment likely to **stimulate creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit**;
- To this end, demand that the next Commission undertakes to reduce the administrative burden on businesses and appoint a Commissioner for **Administrative Simplification**;
- Alongside the **digitalisation of** our economy, we need to develop the **fight against cybercrime**. We need to prepare Europe to be able to defend its digital infrastructures, to ensure the smooth running of our hospitals, emergency services, public services, finance and so on. Because we have become so dependent on our digital services, any interruption can be disastrous for our society. So we need to take action. To this end, the Digital Europe programme must focus on the development of cutting-edge cybersecurity infrastructures, such as the European Cyber Shield or the Cyber Solidarity Act;

- Continue to invest in **research and development** to improve our competitiveness. A particular effort is needed in the energy sector. Excessive energy prices in Europe are beginning to seriously undermine electricity-intensive industries;
- Continue efforts to ensure that **artificial intelligence** systems comply with EU fundamental rights. In doing so, the EU is setting standards for the protection of users of new technologies which it is to be hoped will be applied in a more global context. Legislative advances in this area demonstrate the EU's ability to create standards with a universal vocation;
- Get our armaments industries back on their feet so that we can adequately equip our armies. It is also important to be able to guarantee the essential financing of our military support for Ukraine. If the EU-27 are unable to raise the necessary funds, the EU should launch a European loan for this purpose. Indeed, Europe's security has, to a very large extent, become a function of our defence capabilities. The commitment to increase our defence spending to 2% of gross national income (GNI), on the one hand, and to strengthen our military solidarity with Ukraine, on the other, make it inevitable to mobilise very substantial financial resources in the short term.

1.2 A social policy at the service of citizens

Notwithstanding the fact that entire areas of social policy fall within the remit of the Member States, the EU, in line with the principles set out in the European set of social rights, can have a positive impact on social developments in our countries. It is true that the EU can only devote limited budgetary resources to the social sector.

Despite its limited financial capacity, it can nevertheless influence the choices made by the Member States by inviting them, within the framework of the European semester, to take sufficient account of social priorities. The objective of controlling public spending and the current difficulties in financing social measures are leading to painful budgetary trade-offs. It is our duty, however, to respond both to the need to finance social policy and to the need to consolidate our public finances.

In our view, a return to austerity policies is not the appropriate response to the current situation. Bold measures aimed at stimulating economic growth that is decoupled from climate pollution are essential and undoubtedly more effective than a return to excessive budgetary rigour to bring public finances back into line with the Stability and Growth Pact.

It is also important to integrate the standards of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) gradually but resolutely into the global market economy. The EU must continue to work in this direction, particularly in its trade negotiations with third countries.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic revealed the relevance of the search for new forms of work. Notable progress has been made in the field of telework. The DP expects the Commission to continue to play a facilitating role in promoting new forms of work.

It is in the area of transposing anti-discrimination measures into national legislation that the EU has undeniable power. The DP strongly supports the efforts of the Commission and the co-legislators to eliminate the remaining obstacles to equal treatment.

The DP also encourages the Commission to assume its role as a political driving force, particularly in favour of the integration of people with disabilities into school, working life and politics.

The DP stresses that EU actions to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities must comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This Convention must serve as a guide to ensure real equality within the EU.

The DP is committed to the rapid introduction of the European disability card. This card will ensure uniform recognition of the status of disabled people in all EU countries. It will cover not only access to leisure, culture and sport, but also to all services dedicated to people with disabilities, including transport and commercial services.

The DP advocates the creation of a disability committee within the European Parliament after the 2024 European elections, which would actively involve the European disability movement.

To conclude, the DP recommends the establishment of a new European agency dedicated to accessibility. This agency, inspired by the work of the AccessibleEU centre, would be responsible for facilitating the implementation of all harmonised EU legislation on accessibility.

The DP also recognises that, according to the Commission, in 2022, 95.3 million people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion; (equivalent to 21.6% of the EU population). Consequently, the DP will strive to find solutions to reduce the number of people living in poverty and/or at risk of poverty and social exclusion at European level.

2. Effectively combating climate change

Climate change is undeniably a major challenge for society. Scientific statistics bear this out. Efforts must be stepped up to significantly reduce the harmful emissions that cause the greenhouse effect. The DP is therefore committed to implementing the obligations set out in the Paris Climate Agreement and to translating the commitments set out in the Green Deal into reality.

In line with the last COP28, which took place in Dubai, investments aimed at expanding renewable energies are a matter of absolute urgency. Europe can and must play a pioneering role at global level. The DP supports all initiatives to improve climate conditions and biodiversity. It has been decided that EU countries must reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030. The aim is to make the EU climate neutral by 2050. An ambitious but realistic goal, supported by the DP.

To ensure that the climate transition is equitable, financial and technical support must be provided to the regions most affected by the transition to a low-carbon economy. The EU must therefore mobilise even more financial support for this purpose. It cannot be ignored that the transition to climate neutrality offers major prospects for economic growth, markets and jobs, as well as for technological development.

The DP is committed to strong and ambitious protection of our natural bases throughout Europe. The preservation and restoration of a large number of different ecosystems on our continent must therefore be pursued consistently. Particularly in the context of the climate crisis, the creation of carbon sinks is of singular importance. This is why the DP fully supports the objective of planting at least one billion trees by 2030, projects such as the international "4 per cent" initiative to increase the carbon storage capacity of soils, and the creation of a European framework for carbon capture, sequestration and use.

Sustainable management of natural resources and strong environmental protection are synonymous with the development of the circular economy. In order to avoid single-use items in the medium term, especially single-use plastic objects, and to ensure that only recyclable products are placed on the market, the DP is committed to the introduction of reusable systems for packaging at European level. By 2030, all plastic packaging should be designed to be reusable or recyclable.

In addition, the DP is committed at EU level to a ban on programmed obsolescence and to a generalised "eco-design" approach, so that products are designed from the outset to be repaired and recycled, over and above the standards currently in force.

3. The Common Agricultural Policy

The scale of the recent demonstrations by farmers is simply a reflection of the deep malaise of a profession that feels badly treated by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Farmers' discontent is directed at both the administrative overload and the dumping of agricultural products, some of which, particularly cereals, are now being sold at lower prices than in the 1960s.

The primary sector therefore faces a number of challenges, the most important of which are the pressure on agricultural prices and the difficult ecological transition.

In the medium term, the accession of new countries to the EU is bound to call into question the operation of the Common Agricultural Policy. Ukraine alone has a total agricultural area equivalent to that of France and Germany combined. It is inconceivable that enlargement on this scale could take place without a thorough reform of the CAP and a substantial increase in the EU budget.

The real difficulties lie in transposing the new regulations adopted under the Green Deal. The Commission needs to rethink its climate policy, and in particular its "*From farm to fork*" strategy, not in terms of objectives but rather in terms of implementation.

The massive rejection of the ban policy by farmers in no way means that agriculture wants to shirk its responsibilities in the fight against climate change.

If, for example, a ban on a pesticide makes it impossible in practice to produce a given crop in Europe, the same foodstuffs are produced elsewhere, often outside Europe, where the restrictions are not the same or even non-existent. Faced with this situation, the DP is in favour of the widespread use of "mirror clauses" in trade agreements aimed at ensuring that our trading partners adopt the same standards as those imposed on our farmers.

As for the allocation of arable land for the protection of biodiversity, as provided for in the Nature Restoration Act, the DP is relying on awareness-raising, dialogue and partnership with farmers. At the same time, it is calling for a policy of fair compensation for the farmers affected by these measures. The compensation to be paid in this case must take into account both the loss of income for the plot of land concerned and the impact of the reduction in farmland on the profitability of the farm as a whole.

The DP, convinced that the development of the rural world will depend to a large extent on its capacity for innovation, supports the efforts being made in the field of scientific research to turn European agriculture back into a cutting-edge sector capable of shining on the world stage.

Please refer to the relevant section of the election manifesto for the 2023 general election for the DP's national position on agricultural policy.

4. Health

A European health policy must focus first and foremost on prevention. It must also help to meet the most pressing health needs of the twenty-seven Member States. The protection of our citizens is best guaranteed if the EU can help to fill the gaps in medical equipment and pharmaceutical products revealed by the COVID-19 crisis, and in particular the disruption of supply chains. To this end, it would be advisable to build up reserves of medicines and medical equipment for a given period.

Based on the lessons learned from the recent COVID-19 crisis, it is in the EU's interest to develop a decision-making capacity in the area of health. The European Commission's rapid response from the very start of the crisis has in fact already pointed the way to the EU's new powers in the area of health.

This is why the idea of a Health Union, which has already existed for some time, needs to be developed in a coherent way. To ensure the security of medical supplies, Europe must increase its production capacity where possible and develop its storage capacity where essential.

The DP supports the European Alliance for Critical Medicines, which aims to strengthen the production of critical medicines within the European Union and diversify supply chains.

In addition, medical research in Europe must be given greater support. Although researchers have solid networks that facilitate collaboration within the Member States, the DP insists on the mobilisation of new funding resources for research projects.

The DP is convinced that the considerable potential of digital data should be exploited, without undermining data protection. This would benefit both citizens' health in general and the development of innovative treatments in particular, and will give our European software and technology industry the opportunity to innovate for the benefit of all our citizens. The DP supports the development of a European area for certain health data, promoting the interoperability of health networks in an efficient and anonymised way.

5. Strong institutions for a high-performance EU: democratic change for better lawmaking

The international order, once dominated by the United States, has undergone considerable upheaval in recent years. Each European Member State, taken individually, no longer plays more than a marginal role on the international stage. Together, the Twenty-Seven, and later the Thirty-Five, will be able to influence world affairs on the sole condition that they agree to pool their efforts and equip themselves with the decision-making mechanisms required for the proper functioning of a sovereign power.

We need to be aware of this now, and to make provision for a *Convention to revise the Treaties*, whose task will be to propose the essential adjustments to the way the EU operates to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Pending a reform of the decision-making process, the Council still takes decisions on procedural matters by a simple majority. Where *qualified majority* voting applies, decisions should in future be taken by two-thirds of the Member States representing at least 50% of the population of the Union. Changes to the Treaties should be made by an *enhanced qualified majority*, i.e. by four-fifths of the Member States representing at least 50% of the EU population, as proposed by the European Parliament in its resolution of 22 November 2023.

We advocate abandoning unanimity, particularly on foreign policy, EU financing and citizenship matters.

Sanctions applicable to a Member State that infringes the fundamental values of the Union should be decided by qualified majority.

The DP also believes that the time has come to give **the European Parliament the right of legislative initiative**. There is an urgent need to strengthen the **role of the European**

political parties by removing the obstacles that prevent them from fulfilling their mission, which is first and foremost to structure the debate at European level.

The DP supports the European Parliament's proposal to extend by four weeks the time allocated to national parliaments to exercise subsidiarity and proportionality checks on Commission legislative initiatives.

We also need to follow up the recommendations of the Conference on the Future of Europe by promoting regular exchanges on major political issues in which citizens, and young people in particular, would be called upon to participate.

The DP will continue to defend Luxembourg's role as the capital of Europe, to defend our hosting of a number of EU institutions and agencies, and to ensure that they operate smoothly.

6. Preparing the EU and candidate countries for future enlargements and helping candidate countries to join us

Our own history has taught us to better understand that the countries that want to join the EU are determined to turn the page on precariousness, arbitrariness, insecurity, exposure to military threat and discrimination of all kinds. To offer these countries the prospect of membership is to make them a promise. We are promising the candidate countries that we will later welcome them into a UNION that is based on the principle of the irreducibility of human dignity. This commitment can only be kept if the EU has the means to sanction, by qualified majority voting, the Member State or States that no longer respect fundamental values. We can no longer be satisfied with candidate countries respecting fundamental values only when they join the EU. A reformed Treaty must be able to guarantee that these values will be maintained.

The Member States, divided over the need to make the changes that are essential for the Union to function properly, are thus casting doubt on their unity and their ability to welcome new candidates. It is clear that the candidate countries want to join a *united EU rather than a disunited one*. In any case, it is irresponsible to continue to allow a minority of Member States to deprive the EU of its capacity to integrate new members. We must also be aware of the weakness of an EU that continues to take unanimous decisions on foreign policy. As long as the right of veto is not abolished, the blackmail capacity of the leader of a single Member State remains intact and Putin's interference in the EU's internal affairs a reality.

6.1 Yes to welcoming new Member States in stages

It has to be said that while the candidate countries, in general, are making real efforts to prepare for EU membership, the EU is doing absolutely nothing to improve its absorption capacity, either in terms of its financing capacity or in terms of institutional reform.

Without its institutional aggiornamento, the EU is doing neither the candidate countries nor itself any favours.

However, the candidate countries cannot understand why they should be left indefinitely in the antechamber of the EU despite their real state of readiness. There can therefore be no question of penalising candidates who have made undeniable efforts to move closer to us. This is why, as a first step, if a candidate country meets all the Copenhagen criteria, it could already be integrated into the EU's internal market. A candidate country could also, for example, if it meets the Maastricht criteria, be associated with Economic and Monetary Union. And finally, this same candidate country could be welcomed as a full member of the EU as soon as the latter has been able to agree on the reform of its governance to enable it to function properly with 30 or even 35 members.

The alternative to institutional reform would be to change nothing, to allow attacks on the EU's fundamental values to multiply with impunity, and to be satisfied with the lowest common denominator in foreign policy. This would be tantamount to bequeathing to future generations a collection of states linked only by a few economic interests - in short, a toothless tiger resembling, as it were, a miniature United Nations, a forum in which the inability to decide anything would dominate.

The participants in the conference on the future of Europe came out clearly in favour of a Europe that moves forward, that takes decisions and that does not allow itself to be paralysed by the lowest budgetary bidder or the most recalcitrant when it comes to respect for fundamental rights. The intransigent opponents of any reform of the Treaty are more in line with Moscow's expectations than with the wishes expressed by the conference on the future of Europe. The majority of citizens are ahead of politics when it comes to adapting the way the EU works.

7. The EU's foreign affairs and defence policy

We must not lose a single moment in the determined march towards a European defence. Russia's violation of the international and particularly the European order has upset our priorities in terms of budgetary choices and industrial policy.

The European Union's voice in the world is barely perceptible compared to the impact of countries of the same size and even smaller. And yet, the EU would be capable of providing important answers to the problems that arise on a global scale, provided that it changes the way it operates. Paradoxically, the voice of the world's largest donor of humanitarian and development aid is barely heard outside the EU. Whether in Africa or the Middle East, regardless of its degree of commitment, the EU is far from leading the way. Its inability to make a real impact on the international debate is largely due to its internal divisions.

Moreover, these internal divisions hamper the EU's ability to respond collectively to crises in international relations. The DP therefore encourages the High Representative for

Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in collaboration with the foreign ministers of the Member States, to draw up guidelines for action by the Union so that a collective response can be made more quickly in the event of a future crisis.

Its inability to make a real impact on the international debate is due both to its internal divisions and its lack of boldness in defending its positions. We are concerned by the inability to halt the spiral of violence in which the Middle East has been mired – for decades. We reiterate our unreserved condemnation of the abominable crimes perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and demand the immediate release of all hostages. Europe must, however, continue to support any humanitarian initiative, including UNRWA, aimed at alleviating the suffering of the victims, in full compliance with international humanitarian law. To this end, we are in favour of an immediate ceasefire. We call on the international community, but above all on Israel and the Palestinian people, to seek a political solution to the current tragedy in the Middle East. We invite the EU to spare no effort to encourage the currents of responsibility on both sides to take the path of dialogue in order to eliminate the obstacles, including in particular Israel's settlement policy on the Palestinian territories, which stand in the way of the search for a lasting solution aimed at enabling the two peoples in conflict to live together in full respect of international law.

It is true that each Member State has its own culture, its own history, its own diplomatic tradition, and its own network of traditional relations. Its notorious inability to develop a real defence capability explains to a large extent why its partners pay so little attention to the EU's foreign policy. It would be different if, from the outset, the European Union could agree on a common interpretation of its role in the world, in short if the Twenty-Seven could finally move towards a true political Union. Abandoning the unanimity rule for defining its external action is a major step forward. There is no time to lose in improving the foreign policy decision-making process. To do nothing is to condemn the European Union to remain dependent on the lowest political bidder, much to the delight of the dictator in the Kremlin who, through his Trojan horses with and without government responsibility, now has, so to speak, a right of veto in a sector as important as foreign relations. The DP supports the European Parliament's proposal to put an end to the unanimity rule in foreign policy and calls on the European Council to launch the European Convention to consider changes to the Treaties.

Finally, Europe, aware of the crucial importance of its relations with its major partners, must redefine its relations with the African continent. Three of the most pressing measures are worth mentioning:

1. To advocate **opening up the United Nations Security Council to the African Union** by offering it a permanent seat with the same rights as those enjoyed by the current permanent members;
2. Laying the foundations for increasingly close trade cooperation with Africa, with the ultimate aim of creating an **EU-Africa free trade area**;

3. **Put into practice legislation on due diligence**, which aims first and foremost to protect Africans, and above all the weakest among them, against inhumane practices of exploitation of their wealth. From this point of view, it would be logical to propose a summit on the safeguarding of African resources in which all the countries that have economic and commercial relations with our neighbour, Africa, would be called upon to participate.

8. New migration policy

The European Union's migration and asylum policy, the scene of often irreconcilable differences, is currently undergoing far-reaching reform. Whatever the outcome of the reform project, the DP will under no circumstances accept the removal of the right of asylum for people fleeing war, violations and dictatorships.

As for non-asylum migration, the DP stresses the absolute duty of the competent authorities to respect human rights standards and humanitarian imperatives in all circumstances, both within the EU and in neighbouring countries directly or indirectly involved in the treatment of migrants.

In order to meet this ambitious target, it is important to improve cooperation with countries of origin and transit, placing greater emphasis on humanitarian monitoring in our international partnerships.

Closer cooperation between EU Member States and greater solidarity when it comes to receiving refugees are essential. A fair distribution of burdens between member states and the simplification of asylum procedures are necessary. The DP welcomes the determination to bring the Pact on Immigration and Asylum to a successful conclusion, which in its view represents an agreement, albeit imperfect, but fairly balanced.

In the current context of labour shortages in Europe, migration will represent an opportunity for our labour markets. We therefore need to develop more effective legal channels for skilled workers to enter the EU. Work permits must offer realistic long-term prospects to migrants, thus helping to combat illegal immigration. On the other hand, the DP regrets the lack of enthusiasm shown by most Member States in tackling the root causes of migratory pressures. In the context of its external relations, however, the EU has many levers at its disposal that could open up prospects for young people in their countries of origin, notably through its trade and development policies.

9. Rights and values

It goes without saying that European integration must be based on the fundamental values enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the Council of Europe's European Convention on Human Rights.

Gender-based violence is a violation of human rights. One in three women in Europe has experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence since the age of fifteen. EU Member States should be encouraged to ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention, to make Europe a safer place for all women by recognising the multiple forms of violence. We must prevent all gender-based violence, by taking measures to prevent it, protect the victims and prosecute the perpetrators. This is the only way for Europe to guarantee the protection and safety of all women, girls and vulnerable groups in Europe, women with disabilities as well as women refugees, migrants and LGBTQIA + people arriving in Europe. The DP fights against all forms of persecution and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender and any other form of identity.

Women must have equal access to participation, decision-making, health and sexual and reproductive rights, as well as to gender-sensitive political institutions. The DP values diversity, inclusion and an intersectional approach to equality.

We must give women the means to pursue their political ambitions, we support their efforts at every stage of the process, we mobilise to dismantle the barriers that stand in their way, and we fight every day for a future shaped by their voices.

The DP reaffirms its support for the legalisation of marriage for all and congratulates Greece on its implementation, making it one of twenty-one EU countries to recognise same-sex marriage. However, this is not the case in all Member States, such as Italy. The EU should call on Member States to legalise same-sex partnerships and marriages. Registered civil partnerships and marriages should be recognised throughout the European Union.

Medically assisted procreation should enable a heterosexual couple, a couple made up of two women or an unmarried woman to have a child.

To further strengthen the bond between newborns and fathers, the DP intends to extend paternity leave without loss of pay from ten to fifteen days.

The right to abortion is currently being eroded in a number of countries, including the United States and even Europe. The EU should guarantee better conditions for exercising the freedom guaranteed to women to have a voluntary interruption of pregnancy.

10. Better prospects for our young people

Because of COVID-19, being young today means having spent part of your school career in lockdown. It means running the risk of being unemployed.

We need to ensure that children, many of whom have spent part of their schooling in lockdown, receive the support and protection they need from the outset. The DP therefore supports the EU's global strategy on children's rights and the European Child Guarantee. Education plays a key role in promoting social inclusion and equality in the European Union. While education and vocational training are the responsibility of the

Member States, the European Union must facilitate the harmonisation of national legislation and invest primarily in non-formal education.

The Erasmus + programme, one of the European Union's greatest successes, which brings together over a million young people every year, should be further strengthened. The DP, which is committed to this programme and similar initiatives, is firmly in favour of developing both the quantity and quality of these exchanges. Following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, it would also be beneficial to promote university and cultural exchange programmes with the UK in order to maintain and renew cultural links between young people on both sides of the Channel. In addition, the DP is committed to guaranteeing all young Europeans the opportunity to discover the European Union for a month by train, thanks to an Interrail pass. It will therefore be necessary to extend the Discover EU programme, currently reserved for a limited number of 18-year-olds, to all young Europeans.

Mutual recognition of young people's university diplomas and professional qualifications enables them to better pursue the training that most closely matches their needs within the European Union, and also offers them greater choice and opportunities in terms of employment. The DP is committed to working towards extensive, automated and coherent mutual recognition of diplomas.

The DP is committed to improving support for young unemployed people to help them reintegrate the labour market. Examples include the *Erasmus for young entrepreneurs* programme and the European Commission's ALMA (*Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve*) programme, which enables young unemployed people to gain two to six months' experience in another EU country. The DP supports this project and similar approaches in the interests of future generations.

In the fight against illegal drug use in the EU, a balanced strategy is needed to protect future generations. It is important to decriminalise cannabis consumption and ensure its controlled liberalisation at European level. Controlled liberalisation of cannabis would reduce the black market, protect public health and decriminalise drug use as a whole. At the same time, we need to step up the fight against drug trafficking by strengthening cooperation within the EU and with international partners, and by implementing preventive, educational, harm reduction and rehabilitation measures to combat illegal drug use. These measures are essential to guarantee the safety of citizens, particularly young people, within the EU.

We also recognise that across the European Union, access to housing is increasingly difficult for young people. We propose and aim to support and implement policies to increase the supply of and access to housing for low and middle income households, through a combination of private and public sector involvement. The DP is committed to listening to our researchers, architects, urban planners, mobility experts, etc. to ensure that where it can, the European Union promotes policies and creates incentives that

enable Member States to offer more opportunities for diverse housing typologies for our citizens.

11. The culture

Embracing cultural diversity, harnessing digital innovation, promoting sustainability and leveraging cultural diplomacy are key priorities for a Europe of multiple opportunities and threats. Cultural identity, already plural within nations themselves and a fortiori on a European scale, is both a factor of distinction and of inclusion. We intend to support the EU in its role as a facilitator of cultural exchanges and as a defender of respect for the specificity of European culture in the agreements it negotiates with third countries.

We also expect the EU to defend, with vigour and determination, respect for artistic creation, which is being usurped by companies using artificial intelligence.

The EU must continue to help Member States meet the many challenges of the coming years, including strengthening **culture as a means of intercultural dialogue and social inclusion**. To this end, the EU must be able to contribute :

- good cultural development for all the territories of the EU, by supporting, among other things, the mobility of citizens as well as that of artists;
- developing inclusive approaches so that the diversity of cultures can flourish;
- to promote the opening up of international cultural cooperation to broad sections of the population;
- to adapt and even perfect the practice of "European Capitals of Culture". This concept, which celebrates its 40th anniversary next year, is aimed at these different areas and is specifically designed to highlight the diversity of our rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage and to strengthen the links that unite us.

The future of Europe will depend, among other things, on the mental health of future generations, and this is something we need to focus on in the coming years. Programmes such as *Culture for Health* will be given greater support to counter the trend towards mental disorders among young people.

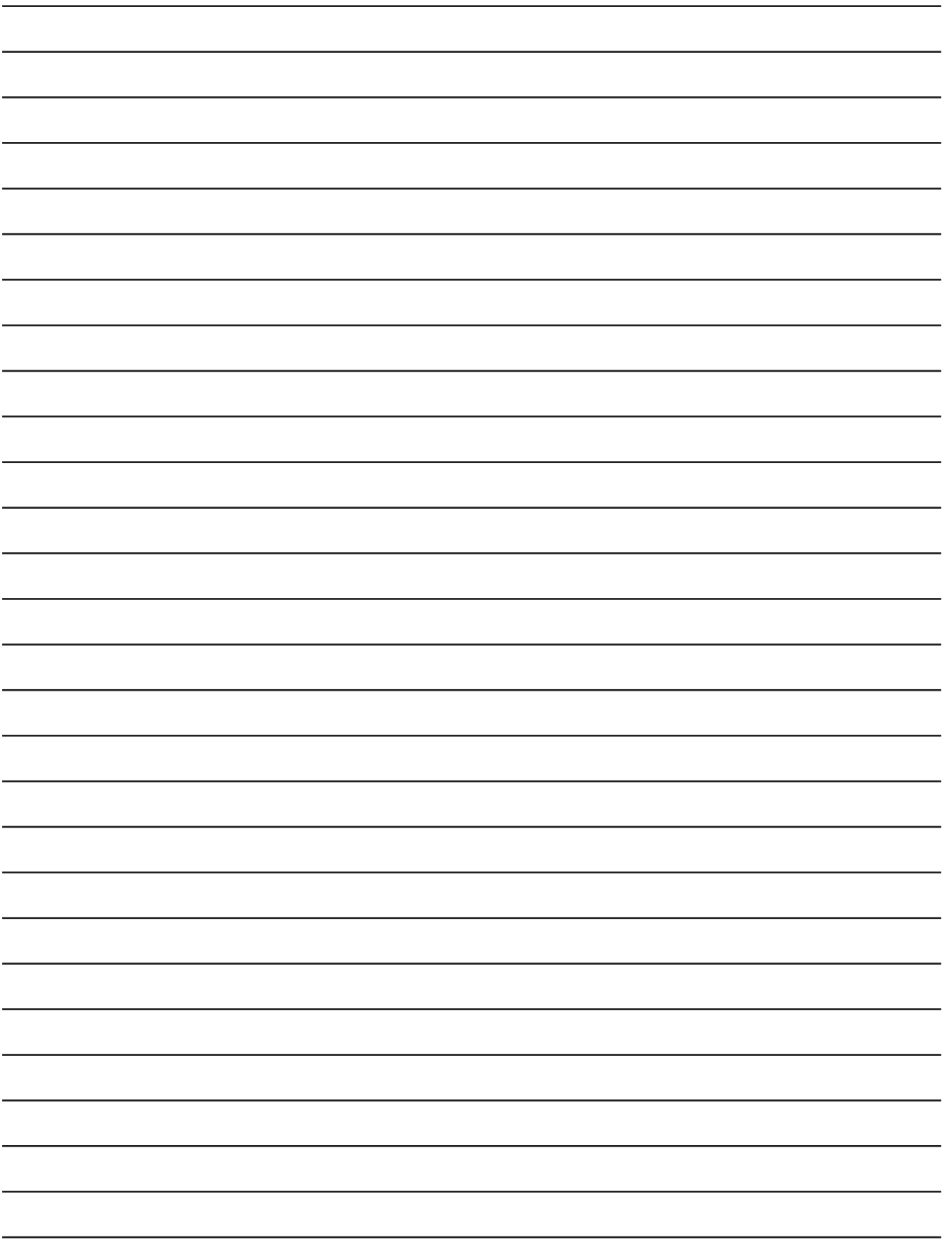
Another challenge lies in the economic impact of culture. Culture and economic creativity are facing massive changes due to the growing application of artificial intelligence, the age pyramid of cultural professionals and the resulting labour shortage, as well as structural deficits. The DP would therefore like to reiterate its support for the many volunteers who are an essential pillar of the cultural sector.

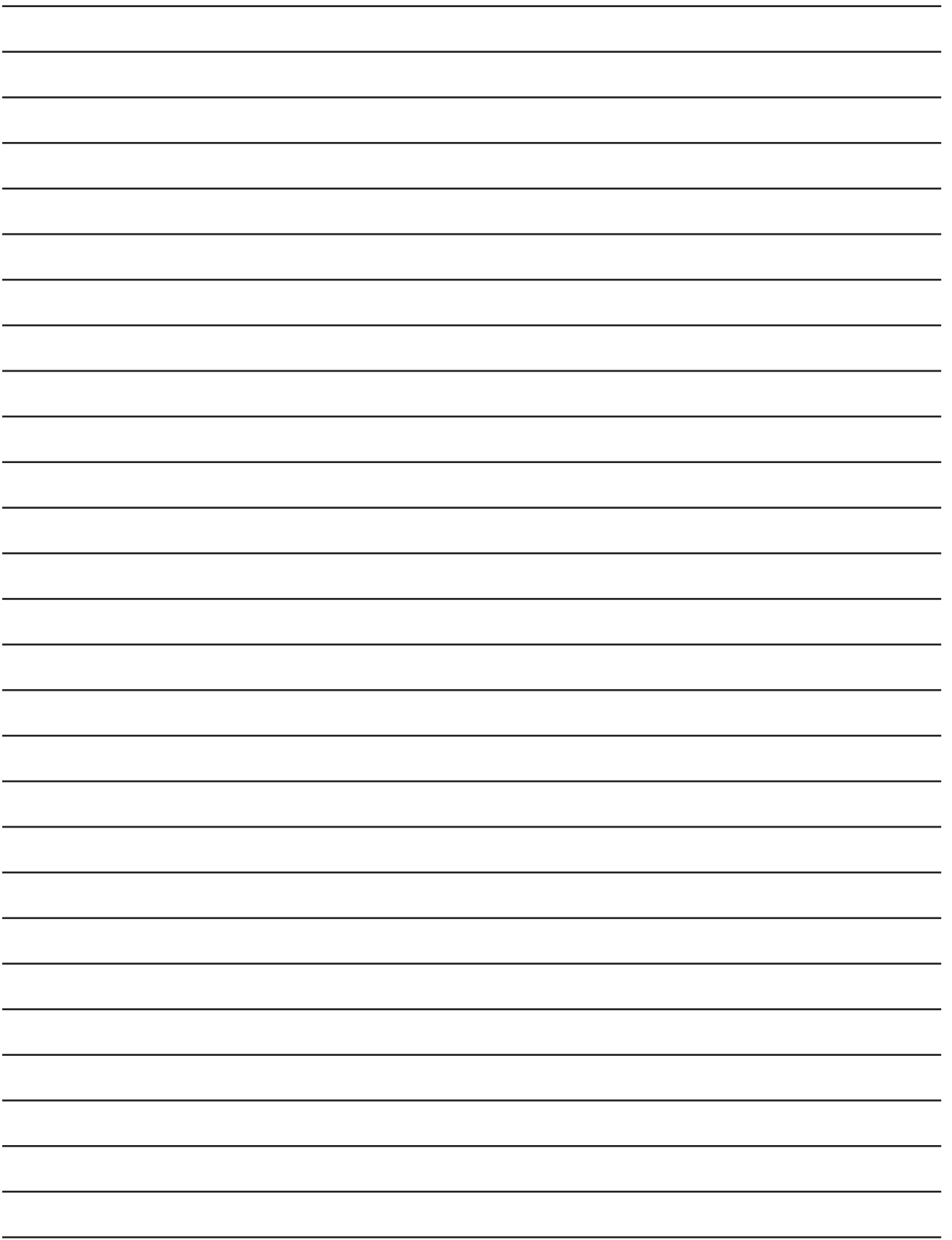
The socio-economic impact of the sector is also marked by the exponential development of artificial intelligence and the digital transformation.

The digital transformation is an integral part of the process, but we need to ensure that, especially in the case of artificial intelligence, the conditions of use and supervision are

created in such a way that the tool is used for the good of society, starting with the younger generation, and that the rights of creators and artists are protected.

It is necessary to intensively promote education, youth entrepreneurship and innovation, but at the same time to ensure that the various pillars of the sector are protected. Particular attention must be paid to attempts at foreign interference in the film industry, and especially in the content of artistic works.





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