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VESTAGER-Rede auf dem FDP-Europaparteitag: Jetzt ist die Zeit, Europa zu erneuern

Die EU-Wettbewerbskommissarin Margrethe Vestager von der dänischen sozialliberalen Partei Radikale Venstre hielt auf dem Europaparteitag der FDP die folgende Rede (Redemanuskript, es gilt das gesprochene Wort):

Dear liberal friends. Dear Nicola. Dear Christian. Thank you very much for inviting me to your European Party Convention. I'm honoured to be here, in this former Postbahnhof in Berlin.

For centuries, these mailing halls allowed people to exchange their thoughts and ideas by sending and receiving letters. It's an excellent spot to nominate your lead candidate for the European elections. I wish all the candidates all the best for their campaigns.

Back in 1962, this site was filled with movie-cameras. Austrian film director Herbert Vesely shot his film *The Bread of Those Early Years* right outside, on the platforms of Gleisdreieck train station. The film is based on Heinrich Böll's short story from 1955. It covers life in the fifties and we may not remember all its scenes. But the ideas resonate today.

The lead character in the film was Walter Feindrich. He was in every way, a regular guy. He made a good living repairing washing machines. He had his own car and house. And as was expected in those days, he was engaged to marry the daughter of his boss.

On the surface, Walter had everything going for him. But deep down, the world felt fundamentally wrong. Walter struggled in a society that decided everything for you: your job, status and even your fiancée. And one day at the station, he rebels. He boards a train and leaves his life behind.

Liberal parties empower people to avoid such dramatic U-turns in life. In our society, you can marry who you want---be who you want to be. But yet, many people in the metros at Gleisdreieck today, again feel like Walter did. Anxious, and insecure.

In many ways, things are also working for them. Never before have so many people in Europe had a job. Our economies are growing, our businesses investing. But when people sit together and talk about the world, they voice distrust. Disbelief. Disillusion.

That's human. Because our happiness doesn't only come from our life today. It also depends on our hopes for the future. Many parents feel that they cannot promise their sons and daughters that one fundamental thing. That the kids will do better than they did themselves. That as long as they go to school and work hard, society will work for them.

Some jump at the unease and point fingers. Or propose to break the European unity that allows us to shape the world together.

That's not my vision. If we want Europe to do better, we should renew it. Not destroy it. So it's time for courage. To rebuild our European democracy. And make people believe in our continent again.

I suggest five principles that everybody who wants to work for Europe can agree upon.

The first principle is fairness. Restoring fairness in our society is a priority. That everybody has the same opportunities in life. That markets works for you, not the other way around.

A fair society means that everyone pays their share of taxes to support our public services. We cannot accept that some big multinationals can avoid making a fair contribution. That also applies to the digital companies that shape our future.

The second principle is rule of law: Europe must stand up for its values.

Europe is built on the rule of law, the deepest belief that no country or company, no matter how powerful, is above our rules.

The rule of law is a way of life. It's about everybody having the trust that they have the same chances to go to school, the same chances to get a job and the same protection if their opinions or even their identities are suppressed. We must defend this.

It's time for Europe to believe in itself. If individual European governments retreat on the rule of law, it's our European responsibility to do something about it.

But Europe is also our home, where we live and travel and work and study. We want that to be healthy, also in the future for our children and grandchildren.

So the third principle we should agree on is to protect Europe's environment.

We can't escape all the effects of climate change. But if we move quickly and decisively, it's still just about possible to stop things getting out of hand. It's just possible to keep warming to one and a half degrees instead of two, meaning up to ten million fewer people will face risks linked to rising sea levels. The world's fisheries will catch one and a half million tonnes fewer fish – instead of three million fewer. And we'll only – only! – lose up to 90% of the world's coral reefs, instead of practically all of them.

But climate change isn't the only issue we face.

You might have seen a photo recently, of a seahorse drifting with the current, its tail curled around something bright pink. The colours – the pink, the blue of the sea, the yellow-green of the seahorse – are beautiful and bold. It's almost a picture you'd want to stick on your wall. Except that splash of pink is actually the plastic stick of a cotton bud, carried out to sea with a tide of discarded rubbish.

By 2021, several single-use plastic items – including cotton buds – should be banned in Europe. Now, we need to set out what we plan to do next, to support the development of alternatives to plastic. And we need to set targets for a world free of plastic pollution.

The fourth principle is a sustainable economy. Europe deserves an economy that delivers jobs and growth, without wasting our natural resources.

To make this happen, we need to enlist the creativity of our citizens. Our entrepreneurs, start-ups and local communities. We are already global leaders in green technology and we can take that further.

Now we see German households using apps to borrow a hammer or drill from a neighbour, instead of buying them. German companies turn waste into new energy.

Those ideas shouldn't stop at our country borders. Our continent must be wide open for them. So we

must renew our Single Market and let creative ideas conquer Europe. Have a strong common budget for innovation. And the easiest possible rules to get business ideas on the market.

We need this European spirit, also for our youth. The best way for them to discover new opportunities is to travel, study and work in another European country.

So today, let's commit clearly. Let's open our continent for future generations. Let's multiply by five the number of youngsters who can study and do apprenticeships in Europe.

Obviously, this open Europe only works if we feel safe in it.

So the fifth principle is a safer Europe.

We have a responsibility to protect refugees who flee war and prosecution. And we need to empower our citizens not to fear the world. Close the Internet for terrorists who recruit radical followers online. Protect our borders with common guards.

And always realise that the safest society is a just one. We need a new deal with Africa, so that Africa can grow and bring its own opportunities to its citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen---it's time to go to work. Unite around these five priorities to change Europe.

The time for deadlock is over. Instead of European countries going their own way, we need common solutions to our common challenges.

Instead of old party politics, we must work with everybody eager to renew Europe.

And instead of separating Brussels from Berlin, we should serve the people at all levels-European, national and local. Because democracy and real progress are built in Europe and our European Member countries and in local communities.

Long ago, Walter Feindrich stood in this station and doubted the world. He watched the trains, waiting for some hope that society could work for him.

On this spot, we can renew our promise to the citizens of today.

Realists can create miracles. European unity can build a better world. We've done it after the Second World War, and can do it again.

All we need is that courage to hope. And the drive to deliver a better Europe.

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