**Rede**

**des Bundesministers des Auswärtigen**

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**zur Ratspräsidentschaft beim Progressive Governance Digital Summit 2020**

**Check against delivery**

**18. Juni 2020**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Fellow Europeans,

Dear progressive friends,

“**Progress equals pain plus reflection**”, Ray Dalio once said when asked about his success in business.

I know it’s kind of risky to open my remarks here by quoting the former boss of the largest **hedge fund** in the world. But in this global crisis without precedent, his words somehow ring true.

As we speak, people around the globe are feeling **pain**:

* Because they have lost someone they loved,
* Because they fear for their health,
* Or simply because they don’t know how to pay their bills.

We owe them hope through **progress**. And that calls for what we are doing here today: **reflecting on what needs to change**.

So **thank you** very much for this opportunity to share some thoughts with you.

In a few days, Germany will assume the **Presidency of the Council of the European Union** – at a time that couldn’t be more challenging.

Only a few weeks ago, Jacques Delors called the lack of solidarity “a **deadly danger for the European Union**”. Many others echoed his concerns.

That was before Germany and France made bold proposals for a true **European recovery plan** that were then taken up by the European Commission.

Our progressive message was finally heard: **Europe cannot save its way out of a crisis of this magnitude**.

For Germany and our European family, this is a **revolutionary paradigm shift towards financial solidarity**.

It is one that Olaf Scholz referred to as Europe’s potential “**Hamilton moment**”.

And, indeed, **this is our moment to make sure that the European Union is never called into question again**. That’s my first message to you today.

Setting up the recovery plan and a budget for Europe’s future will be the **make-or-break point** on our way out of this crisis. And, therefore, it will be the **number-one priority of our Presidency**.

We want Europe to **emerge stronger** from this pandemic.

But the strength I’m talking about will not only be measured in **corporate value or rising stocks**.

This time, we have to put **European citizens** at the heart of our efforts. **This time, Europe’s citizens must feel European solidarity**.

That’s my second message today.

For the first time in history, all Europeans will be protected by short-time working benefits under the **SURE programme**. **Hubertus Heil** will probably talk about this later on.

But we want to go **even further**:

* with a common framework for **minimum wages**,
* a European **unemployment re-insurance scheme**,
* and more **accountability in global supply chains**.

The calculation is easy: **recovery will fail if we don’t make Europe greener, more sustainable, more social, more resilient and more innovative at the same time**.

And we will make sure that these priorities are reflected in the next **budget**.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The paradigm shift towards greater European solidarity must also lead to the **institutional strengthening** of our union – this is my third message.

Not everyone in Europe will be easily convinced by that.

But **who if not Germany** – the country at the heart of this continent, the country that owes so much of its political and economic success to Europe – **must try to convince the sceptics**?

And let me be clear when I state that our goal is not the creation of a **European super-state**.

But the shortfalls in joint action that this crisis has laid bare – in critical areas such as **healthcare, the digital transformation, crisis prevention and civil protection** – were too severe to ignore.

If fixing them requires better coordination – or in some areas possibly **treaty changes** – we must not be afraid to make this step.

Ladies and gentlemen,

**European integration** **is never an end in itself.** **It is the only way to win back the political influence that we as individual nations have long since lost.**

That’s my fourth message – also to those who still question the concept of **European sovereignty**.   
  
We should not fight about words. At the end of the day, we share the same goal. In a **world** **of rival great powers**, **Europe must be able to defend its interests and values**.   
  
The future of our **liberal democracies** depends on this.

This means reviewing existing **shortfalls and dependencies** – whether they are technological, financial or related to trade or security.

* The **United States** will not automatically engage in the crises on our doorstep – no matter who wins the elections in November. But do **European capabilities** and instruments already reflect that? I have my doubts, which is why it is so important that we make progress on the **European Peace Facility**.
* Isn’t it essential to speak with one voice when **China**’s ambition collides with European interests?
* And how can we expect to see change from actors with whom we have **difficult relations** if Europe doesn’t bring its collective influence to the table?

We have an interest in engaging with **Russia** – not only as a more constructive force in our neighborhood, but also on issues like climate change.

We have an interest in continuing our cooperation with **Turkey** on migration.

And we have an interest in preventing **Iran** from becoming a nuclear power.

Finding European responses to these challenges will be a **key goal for our Presidency** – and for our friends from **Portugal and Slovenia** who will be following in our footsteps.

**None of this will be easy**.

However, as progressives, we know that **progress means taking risks**.  
  
So, here is my fifth and final message: **let us be brave as we chart our course out of this crisis.**Those who oppose our idea of “Europe United” have not disappeared. The **Salvinis, Le Pens and Gaulands** of this world fell silent because their political ideologies provide **no answers** in a crisis. And the pandemic made it obvious that **nationalistic policies pose a deadly danger** to each and every citizen.

But make no mistake: the **nationalists and populists** will make every effort to seize back control of the narrative. They will try to **attack our solidarity** and use **old stereotypes** to divide us. We have already seen signs of this.   
  
This is where we need a **strong European civil society**.   
  
We will therefore use our Presidency to create a **pan-European space for debate** – together with partners such as the Progressive Centre, academics, activists and artists from all over Europe.

Their voices must also feed into the **Conference on the Future of Europe,** which should start as soon as the pandemic allows.

How the European Union should look in **2030** and beyond cannot be answered without its citizens.   
  
Ladies and gentlemen,

For me, the COVID-19 pandemic is living proof that **civil society can lead us to the best answers**. Our close cooperation with everyone from major scientists to professionals who we suddenly realised were essential was a profound example.

It was also a genuine **exercise in democracy**.

One that **bound us together**.

One that **the world should not forget**.

Thank you very much, and stay healthy!