

**Conference
of the heads of government of the countries
on 7 September 2023 in Brussels**

Brussels Declaration of the countries

(As of September 7, 2023)

On the occasion of their meeting in Brussels on 7 September 2023, the heads of government of the countries declare:

1. The heads of government of the countries emphasise that a **strong, democratic, and capable European Union** is crucial for the preservation of freedom, peace, and prosperity.

Currently, this freedom is increasingly endangered by both internal currents and external threats. The internationally unlawful aggression of Russia has significantly shaken the European peace order. The heads of government of the countries reaffirm their unwavering solidarity with Ukraine and continue to provide comprehensive humanitarian support, such as through regional partnerships. They welcome financial, logistical, medical, and military assistance from the EU, the Federal Republic, the countries, and other actors to defend against Russian aggression. At the same time, the costs for Russia's continuation of the aggressive war should be steadily increased through political and economic sanctions. The criminal prosecution and punishment of the numerous documented war crimes are supported. Russia's aggressive war has forced millions of people from Ukraine to flee. The heads of government of the countries will continue to provide the best possible support to the Ukrainian refugees. They welcome the decision of the EU interior ministers from March 4, 2022, which allows for the quick and uncomplicated reception of Ukrainian war refugees throughout the entire EU. The heads of government of the countries welcome the concrete prospect of accession for Ukraine, but also for states in South-Eastern Europe. They emphasise that the accessions are also in the interest of the EU.

2. The heads of government of the countries note that increasingly fundamental common values are also being questioned within Europe. The foundation of the rule of law and democratic principles must be further strengthened. Antidemocratic, anti-European, and populist tendencies in a member state have direct consequences both for the individual member state and for the EU as a community of values. Therefore, the countries explicitly welcome mechanisms for upholding the **rule of law** and potential sanctions for the disregard of the rule of law principle. Against the backdrop of multiple crises, the EU's capacity to act must be further strengthened and its response time accelerated through appropriate reforms. This aligns with the discussions and outcomes of European citizens within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. This may require, among other things, a transition to majority voting in clearly defined policy areas in the Council.
3. The heads of government of the countries demand that the EU address the **internal and external challenges** even more decisively. These include, among others, the changed geopolitical order, climate change, the energy crisis, necessary transformation processes, demographic and digital transformation, migration, structural dependencies on other economic regions, fragile supply chains, and ensuring sustainable resource use. The current upheavals are a test for the EU economy and society. A correspondingly high level of innovation and investment is therefore required. They emphasise that the necessary investments cannot be made by individual member states, regions, or citizens and the economy alone, but that this must be understood as one of the central common tasks. Special support is needed for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and citizens with low incomes. The heads of government of the countries agree that the task ahead is a "multi-layered" transformation: a sustainable and digital transformation whose social, societal, and economic impacts must be managed. In this context, the experience gained at the level of municipalities and countries should be used even more systematically and with more foresight for a corresponding EU regulation.
4. The heads of government of the countries emphasise that the fundamental goals of the **European Green Deal** are the central strategic course for the transition to a sustainable, competitive, climate-neutral, and social market economy at the EU level. Climate change and its resulting consequences worldwide endanger the natural foundations of life, including food security. It is therefore necessary to continue

to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in line with European climate targets, to strengthen climate adaptation measures in a targeted manner, and to use natural resources efficiently. However, targets, limit values, and deadlines must be set in such a way that they are realistic, feasible in practice, and coherent with regard to different policy areas. The key technologies needed for the transformations must be decisively advanced. The heads of government of the countries emphasise that the transformation to a climate-neutral economy must be advanced together with industry. In this context, start-ups and SMEs form an important foundation, whereby SMEs as well as business growth beyond the previous SME threshold should be promoted even more specifically than before. The heads of government of the countries advocate greater efforts to promote research and innovation as a decisive factor in competitiveness.

5. The heads of government of the countries note that through a successful **industrial transformation**, economic, competitive, and geopolitical goals of the EU can be achieved in addition to climate policy goals. The availability and secure supply of sustainably produced electricity at internationally competitive prices is increasingly becoming a decisive location factor. The rapid expansion of renewable energies reduces dependence on fossil fuels and their import. In addition, a secure supply of raw materials and chemicals and the reduction of bureaucracy, including the acceleration of official procedures, are essential for all transformation-relevant areas. With regard to the pace of achieving climate neutrality, care must be taken to ensure that **the international competitiveness of EU industry** is maintained and public acceptance is guaranteed. In addition, the heads of government of the countries emphasise the importance of sustainably produced hydrogen. They point out that the appropriate instrumental and funding framework conditions must be created immediately for a rapid expansion of the production and import of preferably green hydrogen as well as for the construction of the necessary – also cross-border – infrastructure.
6. The **increased energy costs** as a result of the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine represent an acute obstacle to the recovery of the economy and the return of industrial production to pre-crisis levels. It must therefore be possible for member states to establish a competitive bridge electricity price for a transitional period,

especially for energy-intensive and internationally competitive companies, until affordable renewable energies are available on a sufficient scale. Energy supply security and stable energy prices represent important aspects for securing the EU as a business location. In order to speed up the expansion of renewable energies, contracts for difference or power purchase agreements, for example, are valuable instruments for creating planning security and investment incentives. To strengthen the European internal market, the interconnectivity of the energy networks must be improved, their expansion promoted and suitable storage solutions developed. The heads of government of the federal states ask the European Commission to make appropriate adjustments to the European electricity market design so that energy price developments that are not in line with the market are not taken into account in electricity price formation in the future.

7. In addition to aspects of ecology and economic efficiency, the implementation of climate protection and energy transition must also ensure that the measures are **socially compatible** and balanced, so as not to jeopardize their acceptance by a broad section of society.

8. The heads of government of the federal states are of the opinion that the **stability of the EU's internal market** must be further strengthened even in a globally challenging environment, while at the same time safeguarding the competitiveness of the European economy. They note that various economic powers outside Europe have set up subsidy programs for important industries and for climate-neutral technologies, among other things. This particularly affects the European solar industry, which is not only threatened by non-European subsidy programs, but currently also by extremely anti-competitive practices of Chinese manufacturers.

The heads of government of the countries emphasise the need to formulate an appropriate common European response to the programmes. This requires, among other things, the redesign and de-bureaucratisation of European state aid law on the basis of the newly created subsidy options, so that both the cohesion of the internal market is guaranteed and economic incentives are made possible for transition regions and also for structurally weak areas in the EU. The heads of government are closely following the debate on the reform of the Stability and Growth Pact.

The challenges mean enormous efforts for public budgets. The countries emphasize that only an internationally competitive economy and stable public finances will enable the EU to meet the challenges of the future in the long term.

9. The heads of government of the countries consider **shorter and simplified planning and approval procedures** essential. This applies in particular to Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI), which are central to the transformation process, as well as to projects to be approved under the Guidelines on State Aid for Climate, Environmental, and Energy Protection (KUEBLL). In addition, European public procurement law needs to be adapted so that it stimulates public investment and demand for climate-neutral products and technologies, including by increasing thresholds in line with inflation.

10. The heads of government of the countries emphasise the **central importance of cohesion policy**. Targeted structural policy investments significantly support a more balanced economic and social development, reduce inequalities between regions and thus promote social cohesion. However, they believe that the manifold social, economic and ecological challenges of the transformation may again exacerbate the inequalities between the European regions and thus acutely endanger the cohesion of the regions. This affects all regions regardless of the level of development. Therefore, the countries demand adequate funding and attractive co-financing rates for the coming funding period [especially] for transition regions, [but also] for more developed regions as growth and innovation locomotives of the EU. The challenges of the present and the future are not solely linked to gross domestic product. Existing strengths must be strengthened in order to keep Europe in line with global competition. In view of this starting position, there is a need for further development of cohesion policy that supports the regions in coping with the multi-layered transformation, makes it possible to react flexibly to the respective transformation needs and at the same time aims to reduce the differences between the regions. In addition to a well-funded and long-term cohesion policy, the heads of government of the federal states emphasise that there must be no weakening of any of the structural funds. Cohesion policy must remain a clear regional responsibility. Only with the involvement of the regions can a Europe that is close to its citizens and works on the ground succeed. The countries are committed to

a cohesion policy 2028-2034 that respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality and that leaves the regions the necessary freedoms in the design of funding programs and offers greater legal certainty and efficiency.

11. The heads of government of the countries agree that the agreement reached by a majority of the interior ministers of the EU member states on 08.06.2023 on the EU migration package can only be the first important step towards a **solidarity-based migration policy** if it is implemented consistently. This compromise shows that Europe is basically capable of action if the political will is there. It has been successful in holding those states accountable that have previously made practically no contribution to the reception and care of asylum seekers. The heads of government of the countries are of the opinion that the room for manoeuvre granted under the solidarity mechanism must not, however, lead to the goal of a solidarity-based system being undermined. They also emphasise that legally secure and human rights-compliant procedures at the EU's external borders must be verifiably observed. Especially for families with children, compliance with special protection rules must be ensured, particularly in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The heads of government of the countries trust that the Council and the European Parliament will conclude the procedure in the trilogue in a timely manner.

12. The heads of government of the countries emphasise that the **reduction of bureaucracy** and the **acceleration of procedures**, as well as close **coordination with practice**, are essential cornerstones for a successful European policy. These adjusting screws must be taken into account in all measures that are necessary to overcome the challenges outlined above. In this context, the heads of government of the countries also point to the observance of subsidiarity. For example, European species conservation policy must allow for regional responses to regionally different challenges in wolf conservation.

13. The heads of government of the countries conclude by underlining **the crucial importance of the European Union in meeting current and prospective challenges** and in securing freedom, peace, and prosperity in Europe. Therefore, it is even more important for Germany to take an active and formative role in order to anchor the interests of the Federation and the countries in the European projects

in the best possible way. The heads of government of the countries expect the Federal Government to fulfil Germany's special responsibility in Europe and to commit itself to European integration. Within the framework of their constitutional responsibility, the countries will actively shape German European policy - in the German as well as in the pan-European interest.

The heads of government of the federal states call on citizens to participate in the 2024 European elections.