

## **Europe is about Europeans, not about institutions**

*We must work together and join forces for the European project. But Emmanuel Macron is mistaken when he thinks that a big 'Conference for Europe' will solve the practical problems and concerns of the European citizen.*

*In times when populists are on the rise and the hollow plea for the return to the nation state is becoming louder and louder, Macron's appeal is refreshing. More than ever, it is important that pro-European forces support each other. That is also why CD&V wants the party of the Hungarian Prime Minister Orban, Fidesz, out of the EPP.*

*But the French President is both a pessimist and a utopian.*

*He is a pessimist because he is too negative about the current state of the European Union. Of course, the gap between the citizen and the EU is too wide. And, of course, the European project is far from being complete and can be carried out better and more efficiently.*

*But steps forward have been taken in recent years. We only have to look at the social Europe where Marianne Thyssen, with the posting directives and the establishment of a European Labour Authority, has worked on the fight against social dumping. Equal pay for equal work in the same place is now a reality. Or take the creation of the banking union, which reduces the chance that the taxpayer would have to pay for a new financial crisis.*

*At the same time, Macron is a utopian with his proposal for a major conference on the future of the EU. Admittedly, a 'Conference for Europe' sounds good. In practice, however, this kind of institutional high masses threatens to result mainly in mountains of paper that could well remain dead letters afterwards.*

*And all this while the Flemish, Belgian and European citizens mainly need concrete proposals. That is precisely what we miss in the open letter.*

*Instead of organizing a high-flown conference, we should therefore focus more on concrete policy proposals.*

*On the social Europe, where we can continue to build a fair internal market with, for example, social mediators who can intervene in cross-border conflicts.*

*On the implementation of the strategy to make our economy climate-neutral by 2050. Europe can intervene more quickly by imposing a European tax on aircraft kerosene and CO<sup>2</sup> emissions. Consensus on this is growing in all Member States and such a measure can only be effective in a European context. Billions of euros that we can invest straight away in extra subways and trains.*

*Or on an improved cooperation in the approach to the migration problem with the strengthening of our coast guard and border guard and common rules for asylum. Why wait even longer to strengthen European border control with 10,000 extra coast and border guards? This would show European citizens straight away the added value of the Union. The number of migrants entering the EU has moreover fallen spectacularly, because, thanks to European decisions, external borders are much more intensively guarded as it is.*

*We can only welcome a fervent plea for the European project. After 26 May, however, let us not lose months of institutional debate. The hands on the plough, in the interests of citizens and businesses. Not words, but deeds. Not conferences, but solutions.*

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