



## ***FOR A EUROPE THAT TRULY RESPECTS FREEDOM, EQUALITY, SOLIDARITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY***

### ***A humanist manifesto for the European elections***

*'All human beings are born free and equal in rights and dignity'*. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) reflects the foundational basis of humanism. Despite many advances however, these rights are still not universally enjoyed. Today, across Europe and the globe, a person's rights and opportunities in life are determined by where they were born.

For Humanists, the UDHR is simultaneously a moral and political framework, and source of inspiration underpinning our basic values of freedom, equality, solidarity and human dignity. From the outset, upholding human rights was central to the criteria for accession to the EU.

Humanists also promote the principle of secularism. It ensures the separation of church and state to guarantee freedom of thought, expression and belief and, to ensure every individual is equal before the law. Secularism as a principle of State organization guarantees fundamental rights to everyone, without discrimination. At a time when populist voices seek to spread division this principle is needed more than ever to maintain cohesion and unity across a diverse Europe.

Secularism is humanist in its very nature: open, based on the emancipation of the individual, respect for people, the free encounter of ideas and the pursuit of greater equality through education. Secularism guarantees dignity for all in their life choices.

With rising inequalities, unresolved migration issues, urgent climate challenges, rising populism and extremism, open racism and religious radicalism and the polarization of society around these issues, the EU's ability to uphold its values on the one hand and address global challenges on the other is increasingly questioned. Many call for short-sighted national solutions instead.

As humanists, we feel that the question is not the scope of European competences per se but rather how our values can remain the basic drivers of European integration. This manifesto proposes a vision of a more humane EU that finds solutions to overcome the growing gap between its values and the policies it pursues. A Europe that is truly based on freedom, equality, solidarity and human dignity.

This manifesto is based on an extensive memorandum of the European Humanist Federation addressed to the European authorities, which will be the line defended by the EHF's national member organisations.

## **OUR PROPOSALS**

### **PRESERVING THE RULE OF LAW AND DEMOCRACY**

Our ability to promote humanist values, secularism, human rights and fundamental freedoms requires institutions to uphold democracy and the rule of law. We therefore call for the establishment of a permanent mechanism for monitoring democracy in Member States, making European funds conditional on respect for democracy and the rule of law and improving judicial review when a member state violates EU values.

### **CIVIL SOCIETY AS A COUNTER-POWER AND KEY PROMOTER OF EUROPEAN VALUES**

Across Europe civil society groups help embed European values and act as a counter-balance to institutional power. The EU should drastically increase funding for national secular grassroots civil organizations and EU networks that promote the rule of law. It should also appoint a Commissioner responsible for dialogue with civil society, improve the mechanism of European Citizens' Initiatives and make European citizenship more concrete by improving transparency and foster possibilities for citizens to get involved at all stages of decision-making.

### **PROTECT A SECULAR VISION OF EUROPE**

The EU is a secular project and it is today threatened by the rise of extreme religious lobbying which seeks to undermine the impartiality of our institutions. Attempts to involve even more religious organizations in EU decision-making processes should be rejected and we request more transparency regarding existing interest groups and their funding sources.

### **DEFEND FREEDOM OF THOUGHT FOR EVERYONE**

The EU should systematically emphasize that freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief includes the freedom not to have a religion or change one's religion or beliefs and that it should not be used to restrict the fundamental rights of others. EU institutions should foster their action to protect non-believers in Europe and worldwide and ensure the effective implementation and evaluation of EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion or Belief, including via non-biased training of EU delegations.

### **DEFEND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

Except in cases of incitement to hatred, discrimination or violence, freedom of expression allows one to criticise a religion, a religious organization, its representatives or its followers. The EU should take a strong stand in favour of freedom of expression, including by calling for the abolishment of the criminalization of blasphemy and of "insult to religious feelings" in Europe and the rest of the world.

### **FREE AND PLURALIST MEDIA AS A BACKBONE OF CITIZEN EMANCIPATION**

A free and diverse media allows the development of pluralistic public debate enabling citizens to confront opinions and build their own. The EU should establish a systematic monitoring of the freedom of the press, media pluralism and concentration in each EU member state, it should urgently address the issue of the safety of journalists on the one hand and whistle-blowers on the other and enhance European cooperation to fight against disinformation.

### **FREEDOM OF CHOICE, A BUILDING BLOCK OF HUMAN DIGNITY**

Because autonomy is key to human dignity, everyone should be allowed to make choices over their own lives. The EU should uphold the autonomy of European citizens and their right to make decisions based on their own convictions and world views. In particular, the EU should actively promote sexual rights, including timely, safe and affordable access to contraception, abortion and maternal health care services as well as comprehensive sexuality education in all Member states. It should also recognize the right to die in dignity and encourage member states to pass positive legislation in this domain.

## **A SOCIETY THAT VALUES ALL PEOPLE FOR WHO THEY ARE**

The EU should step up its efforts in combatting all forms of discrimination and adopt the horizontal anti-discrimination directive pending since 2008. The EU and its Member States should promote ambitious action plans for gender equality, encourage participation of women at all levels of EU institutions and ratify the Istanbul Convention. They should also refrain from unbalanced natalist policies undermining women's emancipation. It should also to step up its action against LGBTI discrimination, including the legal recognition of LGBTI couples in all the Member states, the promotion of safe schooling for young LGBTI people and children of LGBTI couples as well as fighting discrimination related to gender identity and gender expression.

## **NO HUMAN DIGNITY WITHOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS**

EU authorities should allow greater budgetary flexibility to include as a priority the fight against economic inequalities in the next Multiannual Financial Framework. They should implement the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, establish a minimum wage in each EU country at an appropriate level, strengthen the European Youth Employment Initiative, step up against social dumping, strengthen European social dialogue and promote high-quality public services in accordance with the principles of universality and equal access.

## **SECULAR AND PUBLIC EDUCATION AS A CONDITION FOR EQUALITY**

Because civic skills are fundamental for citizens to succeed in life and shape society, Europe should develop citizenship education and reinforce its focus on freedom of thought, critical thinking and media literacy, improve the validation of skills acquired in informal or non-formal education environments such as cultural activities and sports and facilitate multidisciplinary work between civil society and teachers in the preparation of specialized teaching material. The EU should also promote accurate medical and health-related information based on scientific evidence.

## **SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT**

Research and innovation should be conducted in the spirit of free inquiry and the scientific method, embedded in a democratically-set ethical framework. The EU should ensure religious dogma is kept out of science, especially stem cells research. So that civil society helps bring results to citizens, flexibility and simplification should be key drivers of the next EU R&I Framework Programme. Social sciences and their role in informing policy making should be emphasized. Technological applications, especially transhumanism and artificial intelligence, urgently need a clear European set of rules before global standards are built and must be socially controlled by a sufficiently representative set of social actors and the creation of a European agency to monitor the concrete impact of IA applications on the society is suggested.

## **A COMMON IMMIGRATION POLICY, BASED ON SOLIDARITY AND RESPONSIBILITY**

It is only via solidarity between Member States and solidarity with migrants that Europe can address migration. The EU has to establish a common immigration policy, the absence of which is an affront to the human rights of those affected. It should set up safe and legal access routes and reception centres for asylum seekers, revise the Dublin Regulations, ensure equitable distribution and solidarity among Members States, promote integration and train personnel to properly handle complex cases such as LGBTI or atheist asylum seekers. EU guidelines in this domain could have a beneficial effect.

## **A STRONG EUROPE PROMOTING PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS ON THE WORLD STAGE**

For the EU to promote peace and human rights, it has to be irreproachable internally. Furthermore, it should improve its decision-making procedure on foreign policy by abolishing unanimity voting in the Council, further involving the European Parliament, strengthening the European diplomatic network,

making human rights the backbone of its global action, enhancing efforts to disarm and combat the proliferation of weapons and guaranteeing respect for international law in all circumstances.

### **SOLIDARITY WITH FUTURE GENERATIONS: CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The effects of global warming are now scientifically proven and quantified. Despite the evidence, short-term competitiveness and business-as-usual still prevails. The EU must fully implement the Paris Agreement, improve air, water and food quality, protect biodiversity, invest in sustainable mobility, promote the circular economy and reform its agriculture. It should lead in reaching Sustainable Development Goals and step up the fight against tax evasion and fiscal fraud. It should ensure that trade agreements respect fundamental rights.