

Speech Manfred Weber – EPP Valencia congress – 29 April 2025

Dear friends, dear delegates, dear EPP family,

Many thanks, dear Alberto, dear friends of PP, many thanks for your invitation to Spain.

España siempre ha estado en el corazón de Europa—y hoy, el corazón de Europa láte aquí, en Valencia.

It's not just the sun and the great Spanish culture — politically being in Spain means first of all being among winners. Since Alberto is president of the PP he has won all elections, e.g. last year, PP doubled its seats in the European Parliament. And I am sure - soon, Alberto you will be the next prime minister of Spain.

It's great to be in Valencia, it is great to be in Spain!

Last time for an electoral congress, we met in Rotterdam, 2022, three years ago! You elected me as the successor of Donald Tusk.

The EPP was politically on the defensive

The socialists dreamed of a social democratic decade

Greens set the political agenda

Macron & the new liberals sounded the death knell for traditional parties!

We were in opposition in 19 countries; numerous commentators had already declared the political end of Christian democracy.

Rotterdam was a turning point in our history.

We stood up, and we did it the EPP way. Listening, unifying and delivering, and, you know me, never turning it into an ego show but always working in a team spirit - our EPP method has paid off.

Rotterdam 8 prime ministers and presidents - today in Valencia 13!

the socialists have 3 and the liberals 3... EPP has 13. Half of the Council is EPP!

For a moment, let's enjoy looking back at the last three years:

I start with the longest serving colleagues - Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Andrej Plenkovic have been re-elected three times and delivered great success stories for their countries

The president of Cyprus Nikos Christodoulides, I called him after his victory, he committed to be part of our team and Anita accepted it,

Luc Frieden won in Luxembourg;

GERB-party, Boyko: strong in Bulgaria;

We won the north of Europe - the icebreaker was Ulf Kristersson in Sweden, Petteri Orpo in Finland followed, Evika Silina in Latvia, and soon Simon Harris will be back as Taoiseach in Ireland;

In several EPP countries we are currently campaigning

Romania - thank you to Klaus Iohannis - now we cross our fingers for Crin Antonescu.

And Portugal deserves stability - and the man for stability is Luis Montenegro - good luck.

Today, we already listened to the new chancellor of Austria - Christian Stocker and I thank him for keeping Austria on a pro-European line. And next week, the German Bundestag will elect Friedrich Merz as new Chancellor of Germany - congratulations and good luck!

In Belgium, Czech Republic, France I want to pay respect to Michael Barnier, and in Italy with Antonio Tajani, we deliver in all countries stability and a clear pro-European perspective.

We, as EPP, are strong in Switzerland with Gerhard Pfister, in a lot of western Balkan countries and in a few months, Erna Solberg has a good chance to become prime minister of Norway again!

I can't mention all 50 member parties and the 16 associated members...

But finally, let me highlight two elections -

First win - our former EPP president. My predecessor. He asked us three years ago the question - shall I fight against PiS and Kaczyński again? And Donald Tusk brought Poland back as a strong nation to Europe, the place Poland deserves! And in a few days, Platforma will finalise the mission - Rafał Trzaskowski will become president of Poland - all the best!

Second win - we can really be proud of: front line country, fighting against Russian propaganda, developing a small and weakened country to a modern European state! It is amazing what she did - Congratulations to Maia Sandu for her reelection as president of Moldova.

We made it! We won! That is the EPP at its best!

Based on these national successes, we also won impressively the European elections in 2024:

One year ago in Bucharest, we told people: we are ready!

We voted our manifesto - based on listening to farmers, entrepreneurs, students, pensioners all parts of society. For us, European democracy does not begin in citizens' forums - but right here - in this congress hall - when people from very different corners of Europe come together and make policies! Our associations YEPP, senior's union, women's organisation, workers, farmers and many more we are proud of you — our groups in the parliamentary assemblies of OECE, council of Europe, NATO or our strong pillar in the committee of regions - Sari, we are the mayors party of Europe and we are proud about this! We are the EPP and together we defined our program.

After listening - not being populist, but showing leadership, giving true answers and defining the main ideas for tomorrow: security, democracy, prosperity!

We secured a democratic Europe, strengthening the lead-candidate concept! Our candidate Ursula von der Leyen delivered a great and successful campaign. Around 50 million Europeans voted for us. They know - Europe is in good hands. Ursula, you have a strong mandate - Respect and congratulations for your re-election as President of the European Commission!

And based on this mandate, we also have secured the re-election of Robert Metsola as President of the European parliament. Roberta - you stand for a new generation, a modern way of doing EPP politics - Roberta - our party is proud to have you leading in Europe. Congratulations to Roberta Metsola!

And by the way - two female presidents - one from the biggest country and one from the smallest country of the EU - that's the EPP at its best!

The EPP group today counts 188 members - the only centre group winning seats. And don't forget, not only because of our election result - but because I convinced non-EPP parties to join our group! Our expansion strategy worked.

Denmark, the Netherlands, Czech Republic - new friends joined - some more liberal, some more conservative, but all EPP now!

I remember - Hungary: It was a sunny day, the 14th of June, the Friday after the European elections. Around 30% of Hungarian people voted for a new movement, a surprise, a success, the TISZA party was born. I traveled to Budapest, I met with Peter Magyar the new leader. There was no party-structure, we met in a business hotel - and I told Peter: the EPP is the party of the rule of law and the party of Europe - with your seven MEPs - you are welcome to the EPP family, and they joined!

And I am sure next spring Hungarian people will end corruption - Victor Orban will retire and Peter Magyar will be the new face of a strong and independent Hungary.

Yes, we won. And after winning? It's about delivering - that is the message of Valencia! We work hard, we deliver - the EPP is trustworthy.

Without us: Europe would have followed the Greens in their fight against the single market, or modern trade agreements like Ceta - stand alone in Trump's world without any alternative trade agreement? We are the ones saving Europe's economies!

Without us: where would our industry and jobs be today, if we had not stopped the ideological climate policy à la Frans Timmermans? To protect the climate is a key task for our generation - but we are the ones turning climate policy into a job machine!

Without us: What kind of landslide would the populists have won in the last European elections, if we had not changed the course on migration policy? One year ago we finalised the Migration pact, we signed agreements with Egypt, Tunisia and, if needed, we were ready to build up fences in Finland, Poland, and Greece to stop the instrumentalisation of migration. We reduced the number of illegal arrivals by more than 50%. That's the way to fight against radicals!

And most importantly, the war in Ukraine - where would Europe's security be now without our sanctions against Putin's brutal dictatorship, our humanitarian assistance, arms

supplies and a clear EU-perspective for Ukrainians? We did it! Instead - Orban, Le Pen and Weidel are surrendering European interests for a handshake with Putin. Today, we are building a European pillar of defence and We are defending the European way of life. Our

Ukrainian friends are doing so - Yulia Tymoshenko, Petro Poroshenko and Vitaly Klitschko - we only can say - respect and thank you!

Together with our friends in Belarus, Armenia and Georgia - Whatever Washington will do, we stand on the side of all freedom fighters and first of all on the side of Ukraine, Putin will lose, Ukraine will win!

Thanks to all of you, Christian Democracy is in Europe's driving seat!

And what's next? Just like in football - every championship celebration is followed by a training camp. That's why I initiated a party reform - we will modernise ourselves.

And politically, the task is huge: An authoritarian wave is sweeping across the world and eating its way into Europe. A lot is at stake.

What are the others doing?

Social democrats give up the working class.

Greens and Liberals are escaping only to the nice city quarters of well-educated, privileged voters

The populists are strong because too many democrats are weak.

And we? I spoke about our EPP-DNA - listening (people's party!), leading, delivering! That is fundamental - but is it enough?

I don't think so.

Everybody in this hall feels it: We are entering now in a new historic phase. The era of the past 20 years, no question good years, that era is gone: Years of, I would call it, pragmatic individualism, a quite technocratic policy understanding. We, the EPP, we managed things, we said to voters „don't worry“ things are in good hands.

Politics became boring, without alternatives.

Perhaps the 2024 European elections were the last we could win with this approach.

Now, a new era is about to start. To win the fight, we need to provide not only good facts and concepts but also a desire for the future, hope and enthusiasm.

Our main political competitor is the extreme, those fighting against Ukraine, rule of law and a united Europe.

If we don't define the political aspirations, the bigger goal, our story, our narrative, the populists will set the agenda – with their hate speeches, splitting and destroying.

To win the fight, we have to win minds and hearts.

And... Too many in politics simply say what they don't want, they are against Trump, against the green deal, gender ideology, Europe...

Instead, we have to be clear about what we want!

Let's be more specific:

The main task of our generation, and all leaders mentioned this in their speeches today, is a common defence and foreign policy.

In the 1950s - Christian democrats as De Gasperi, Adenauer and Schumann didn't speak about tanks, numbers of troops - that was the business of generals.

They spoke, 7 years after the Second World War, about making peace with the arch enemy, about forgiveness. And by creating a European Defence Union, war within Europe would become impossible - they promised lasting peace - wow!

And today - we speak about - common procurement!

Until now we only strengthen national armies - and we do this in a moment when the French right extreme parties are knocking on the doors of the Elysee and the AfD gets 25% in German polls - strong right-extremists and strong national armies - historically, this frightens me! National armies are fundamental, not enough - we have to add a European shield - we need an architecture that makes Europe irrevocable.

The same goes for our economy. Christian Democrats invented the social market economy. The idea: Not technical issues but how can we defeat communism! And today? Our economic answers of today have to beat the authoritarians, is China's system creating better living conditions than our system? that's the level of challenge.

And we must translate this into people's everyday lives.

Loneliness - top social issue?

Education in a Chinese TikTok world?

Do you remember, 20 years ago, your postman delivering every day your mail. In my village, it was a man with an uniform and there was a personal relationship, we knew him. And today? The Amazon driver! Do we care about his or her working-conditions!

And probably the biggest challenge to our way of doing politics is: everyone has his own reality! Authoritarians are creating their own truth. They say, freedom of speech allows also to work with lies. We believe facts are facts! We do not play with the truth. But let's be honest, it is a huge battleground.

We know and we feel things are fundamentally changing - and we have to provide answers. That is the reason, why we, as the EPP, have to write a new, general centre-right political programme during the next 2 years.

In Rotterdam, I called the EPP the rock of Europe - the solid ground. Now in Valencia, I would call the EPP the beating heart of Europe.

We must win the mind and hearts of Europeans.

And finally - families; communities are at the basis of our thinking, the heart of our narrative.

As you know, I come from a small village in Bavaria, it's called Wildenberg: 1.300 inhabitants, the school on one hill, the catholic church on the other hill the historic castle... and we have only one shop in our village. But we are proud to have four bars, the so called *Wirtshäuser* with great Bavarian beer - this helps keeping society together.

It's this sense of togetherness that defines Europe. Having roots, being grounded. Next to this sharing the same values like democracy, the rule of law, freedom.

Americans may have the American Dream, but we have something better: the European Way of Life.

We, as the EPP, stand for the European way of life like no one else.

Last week, we mourned the loss of Pope Francis. Meeting him and speaking with him was the honour of a lifetime for me.

Allow me to quote what he said in a speech in the European Parliament: "To build Europe it takes a strong inspiration, a 'soul.' It takes 'dreams.' It takes values, and a high political vision."

That is our job description for the upcoming years. To give Europe the soul, the dreams that Pope Francis spoke about.

To stop the authoritarian wave and defend our European way of life!

The EPP as the rock and the beating heart of Europe.

This is our mission. This is our job. This is our moment. Thank you.

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