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THE STATE OF THE UNION

Each one of us knows of a family where the sister sings Hare Krishna to the disappointment of her Catholic grandma and now only eats couscous instead of mum's roast pork, or the son from a wealthy family who demonises capitalism and never misses a protest. As diverse as a family may be, the family remains – it is still often contested – but however diverse the views are, we still laugh together at parties, dance together at weddings, mourn together at funerals. For me, Europe is a big family. For me, there's the brother who wants to reinvent the world, and the mother who stands by tried and tested virtues. Europe is just as diverse as a family can be. And even if our visions of a social Europe and a Europe of free markets collide – Europe is my family. In the end, we march through Paris and mourn the victims of terrorism together, celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall together, and remember the victims of the Second World War together. If freedom of expression in Denmark is attacked, then freedom of expression in Europe is attacked. When Africans drown off the coast of Italy, that isn't an Italian problem – but a European one. When Germany wins the football World Cup, the title goes to Europe, and when the Frenchman Patrick Modiano wins the Nobel Prize in Literature, then a European wins the Nobel Prize in Literature.

A community cannot function without assistance

Europe is the largest economy in the world, home to many bright minds, the source of impressive inventions, and a place which quite rightly is passionately admired by many outside Europe. With 28 Member States at present, the European Union has achieved something unique in the history of Europe – a united, peaceful Europe. For Austrian students, spending a semester studying in Italy is not uncommon, while Polish tradesmen can find a second home in Great Britain. Europe is also an incentive for many of our neighbours. The constant enlargement has exported not only the idea of Europe, but also our values. The rule of law, democracy, the fight against corruption and respect of human rights are just a few of the values of our family. However, the work is far from done. There are still white spots [non-EU countries] on the map of Europe; be it Serbia or Norway. There's still work to do in convincing people. When travelling across the borders, although the traffic jam of freedom may have disappeared, Europe still hasn't found its way into the minds of many people. Unemployment and social inequality are the breeding ground for critics. It is too easy for them to criticise this model of success and to preach of a utopia of nation states, which should have long been refuted by the history of war and poverty. Making citizens aware of the lack of alternatives to a common Europe is the challenge of the present era. To do this, we need a Europe where it is not only a small minority that gets to feel and see the benefits, but a Europe which has something to offer for everyone. Laws which enable telephone calls to be made throughout Europe at the same price are going in the right direction; as is the will to create a common, strong foreign policy, such as the plan to position Europe as an advocate of climate protection and to speak with one voice as a proponent of data protection and free Internet. But Europe also needs to shed an illusion – a community without assistance cannot function. Those



who are better off must help those who are worse off, regardless of what compensation is to be expected, or who is at fault. Completely in the spirit of: "If my brother or my sister makes a mess of things, or a family member is in need, then I will help". It's also clear that this assistance must not be taken too far, but on no account can a community function in the long term when assistance is prohibited by law. The levying of taxes cannot remain the exclusive right of the nation states. Even though this may not hold true in all cases – many things are more effective when done as a community than by each individual on their own. The impact of symbolism must not be underestimated. Brussels should not be a name that Romanian and Portuguese pupils only see in huge letters in the newspapers. All pupils should go on a class trip to Brussels during their school career. Seeing the institutions of the Union with one's own eyes, that this apparatus where people from all Member States work together for all citizens of the Union really does exist, can make a crucial difference to so many Europeans who will be eligible to vote in the future. A football tournament, to complement the Confederations Cup, in which Europe and the other continental confederations compete against one another, each with a selection of their best players, would bring the idea of a common Europe into the living rooms of citizens. Greater emphasis should be placed on education once again. Every pupil, whether from Estonia or Sweden, should receive an education which guarantees equal opportunities. A common European education fund, which every child can apply to for a grant for their education, would show: "Europe is there for me, Europe is there for my child".

Europe must become a real common destiny

A united Europe, from the Finnish lakes to the beaches of Spain, from London's financial centre to the ancient sites of Athens, has still not been achieved. But finalising this project is within reach, and who would have thought that 70 years ago, when the lungs of our grandparents were still filling up with the dust from the destroyed cities of Europe? Those who have had the fortune to experience a happy family life, Theodore Roosevelt once wrote, have experienced the greatest happiness on Earth. The old and new Member States of the Union are the children of a common Europe. They have grown into independent adults. However, this independence is not an obstacle to living together. The fact that the Member States have their own culture and cheer on their compatriots at sporting events is just as natural as a child living their own life as an adult, realising their own ideas. However, just as happiness can't be found in being a hermit, it won't be found in a Europe of nation states—but in the community instead. The success of Europe lies in the fact that we grow together as a family – that Europe is becoming a real common destiny: assisting one another, supporting one another and challenging one another; that's the way to a bright future.