

liberal Bulletin

Liberals Building a Safer Europe

- Commissioner Hadja Lahbib in conversation
- A secure Europe in an insecure world
- Meet our Ministers: Iceland, Denmark & Finland

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The Big Liberal Crossword

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party, EUPP

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Editorial

Dear liberal friends,

In uncertain times, people search for something to hold onto — something that gives them strength and hope. For me, that something is Europe: not just a place on the map, but our shared home built on freedom, peace and democracy.

But today, the peace and stability we once took for granted are under pressure. War has returned to our continent. Authoritarian forces are testing our resolve. And new insecurities — from digital threats to economic shocks, climate disasters and public health crises — are reshaping the world around us.

Security isn't just about tanks or treaties. It's about all of us — about feeling safe in our home, our identity and choices. That's why, as liberals, we must place people at the heart of Europe's security. Because security means protecting both our freedoms and those who rely on them.

At our Council in Helsinki, we will adopt our political strategy for the next years. Our guiding compass, rooted in liberal values, shaped by the realities of today and inspired by the future we want to create. Our mission is clear: to win hearts, minds and seats. To grow a united, inclusive and strong liberal family across Europe by 2029.

In a world marked by growing uncertainty, we liberals must lead with both conviction and compassion. That means standing unwaveringly with those fighting for freedom. It means investing

in Europe's own defence, resilience and innovation. And it means confronting those who seek to divide us, both from within and beyond our borders.

But most of all, it means staying close to people. Listening. Connecting. Showing that liberal solutions are human solutions.

In this issue of the Liberal Bulletin, you'll see how liberals are rising to the challenge. From Commissioner **Hadja Lahbib** shaping the EU's global response, to our Ministers advancing cooperation and security from the UN to the Council of the EU and local communities.

This leadership is front and centre at this year's Council in Helsinki hosted by our member party leaders **Antti Kaikkonen** of Keskusta and **Anders Adlercreutz** of SFP. Finland's distinctive approach to security offers important lessons for Europe, and you'll find them in these pages.

As your ALDE Party President, I am honoured by the trust you've placed in me and energised by the road ahead.

Let's stay united. Let's stay hopeful. And let's keep building a safe, free Europe for all.



ALDE Party President

 @svenja_hahn



"Security is at the heart of the EU's strategy precisely to respond to our citizens' current needs."



Hadja Lahbib

**European Commissioner for Equality,
Preparedness and Crisis Management**

 @hadjalahbib

No freedom without security

*In a world increasingly defined by uncertainty, the European Union's ability to prepare, protect and respond to natural disasters and hybrid threats has become a cornerstone of its legitimacy. **Hadja Lahbib's** approach is guided by a deeply liberal philosophy: security must start with people and serve them.*

Behind the headlines is a European Commissioner who speaks with conviction, shaped by years in conflict zones as a journalist and now leading a portfolio that touches every corner of European life.

Commissioner Lahbib, your role brings together equality, crisis preparedness and humanitarian aid, three areas that might seem unrelated at first glance. How do they reinforce each other, and why is it so important to address them together at the European level?

I tried to imagine my portfolio physically and I think it would make a great stool, because it has three legs – and what they have in common is people, human beings. In a crisis, the first victims are often the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. And in the case of sudden events such as environmental disasters, wars and terrorist attacks, the first victims are often women, children and the elderly. For me, my portfolio embodies European values transformed into action: it's all about how to build a European Union that listens, protects, promotes solidarity and has a genuine vision for society.

We often talk about security in military terms, but your approach seems to start with people: protecting rights, ensuring dignity, responding to need. How has the meaning of “security” evolved today, and what does it mean to you in a European sense?

Security is at the heart of the EU's strategy precisely to respond to our citizens' current needs. We are experiencing an increasing number of wars, climate disasters, floods, wildfires, an energy crisis and power cuts. The EU is helping to build resilience in each individual, and at the heart of my mission is to build a Preparedness Union Strategy that enables everyone to know how to respond to these crises. This consists of 30 actions designed to coordinate a united civilian response, building a society where everyone has responsibility, empathy and attention for the most vulnerable, to ensure that we are able to face these daily upheavals together, leaving nobody behind.

These actions cover all areas of responsibility, and the first one responsible is yourself. For example, let's take something that we can all do very easily: what do we need to get through 72 hours of a power outage? Water, a torch, a radio, cash... You have to take your own personal circumstances into account, such as whether you use the internet or need to take medication. But you should always keep in touch with your neighbours, look out for your grandmother, your little girl who may have a disability, your mother who is a bit more fragile. So this is what it's all about: resilience at all levels of society.

You come from a liberal political family where freedom and equality are core values. But in today's unpredictable and fast-changing world, how can these values become a source of strength and resilience for Europe's future?

As a liberal, freedom is ingrained in me because it means responsibility. Anyone who takes freedom into their own hands, for example by leaving their parents' home for the first time, suddenly feels the weight of responsibility on their shoulders. I want to turn what is written in our treaties into everyday reality for our citizens: women, men, LGBTIQ+ communities, and the most discriminated groups such as Roma people and people with disabilities. Unfortunately for them, equality is still far from their everyday reality. It will be my job over the next years to implement all the directives which were adopted during the previous term and must now be turned into reality. Because without freedom, there can be no equality.

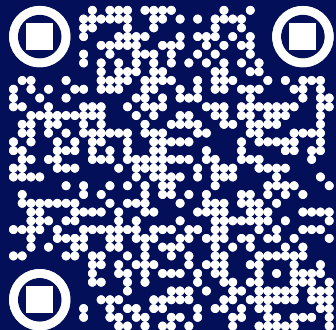
You've spent time in some of the world's most fragile and crisis-hit regions, witnessing human suffering up close. What has been your biggest wake-up call in these months as Commissioner?

The hardest moments are also the ones that touch you and mark you for life. For me, these are definitely my visits to refugee camps, such as the Zaatari camp in Jordan. There is no activity in

these camps: no theatre, cinema, library, spiritual culture, nothing to open minds or prepare children for the future. So you ask yourself: *"What will become of them?"*. And they look you in the eyes and tell you: *"It's all good, we eat, we're not dying anymore, we're not being killed anymore"*.

My primary concern is to find ways to help them more effectively, because we now have the terrible privilege of becoming leaders in humanitarian aid following the withdrawal of the United States. This is an opportunity to show that the EU is there, a united, loyal, committed and reliable partner for the values of solidarity and equality.





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watch the
full video
interview



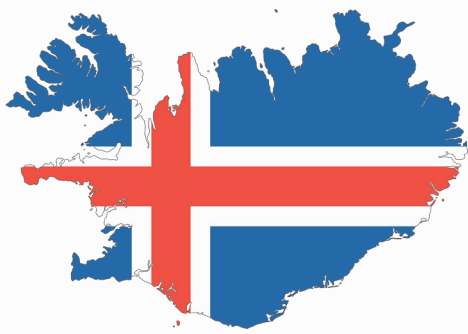
So, I have a lot of meetings in the field with our partnering NGOs to see how we can work more effectively to localise our efforts, create a circular economy, involve more local NGOs and host communities. I am sure that we can turn these crises into a tremendous opportunity to work on greater resilience, both for communities that must flee and for those who are hosting.

You've stepped into this role at a moment when European citizens are asking tough questions about whether the EU can still deliver. If you have one message to share, what would you want them to hear loud and clear?

Europe is a project for peace and prosperity, and for that we need security. Because when we're secure, we're free and we're there to build a more egalitarian society where everyone is free to make their own choices: that is what the EU is all about. It has proven this in the past, it will prove it in the future and it proves it every day.



***"I want to turn what is written in
our treaties into everyday reality
for our citizens."***



Small State, Strong Voice

Iceland's liberal vision for Arctic security and global cooperation

*In December last year, **Viðreisn** leader **Þorgerður Katrín Gunnarsdóttir** stepped into the role as Iceland's Minister for Foreign Affairs at a time of global upheaval. We sat down with her for a Q&A to learn more about her vision for Iceland's foreign policy, the country's evolving role in NATO and the Arctic and how small states can lead with principle on the world stage.*



As new Minister of Foreign Affairs, what unique perspective do you bring to Iceland's foreign policy at this critical time? What motivates your approach to diplomacy and security?

My perspective has been shaped by years in politics and a deep belief in liberal democratic values, gender equality and international cooperation.

At this critical time, marked by growing global instability, climate urgency and shifting power dynamics, Iceland's voice must be clear, principled and proactive. My approach to diplomacy is rooted in the idea that small states can have a strong impact when they lead with integrity, consistency and courage. Iceland has long championed human rights, rule

of law and sustainable development, and I intend to strengthen our role in defending those values multilaterally and regionally.



Iceland's location in the North Atlantic places it at the heart of regional security. How do you see Iceland's role evolving in response to increased geopolitical tensions?


Iceland is strategically located in the heart of the GIUK gap, the vital corridor between Greenland, Iceland and the UK connecting the Atlantic and Arctic. Our location was crucial to our Allies in World War II and played a key role for NATO throughout the Cold War. This is still true today but heightened by the growing significance of the Arctic. That is why it is essential for Iceland to engage in defence cooperation efforts that directly impact us, particularly NATO activities in the North Atlantic and the High North. We are also stepping up our work in regional bodies through Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO), the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) and more cooperation with regional Allies.

As a founding NATO member without a standing army, how do you see Iceland strengthening its role in NATO, given rising global instability?

Like other NATO members, Iceland is strengthening its defence, and the first step is the ongoing work to formulate a security and defence policy for Iceland. The policy will describe our security challenges, with an emphasis on external threats, highlight Iceland's goals for international security and defence cooperation and discuss the necessary defence preparedness, as well as the organisation and capabilities we need to put in place. It will also point out possible reforms to the legal and institutional framework for defence. The policy will be submitted to the Althingi, our Parliament, later this year.

Our single biggest contribution to NATO is, and always has been, Iceland's geographical location and the facilities we provide here in Iceland. We operate the Icelandic integrated air defence system and provide host nation support at the Keflavík Air Base. We monitor air traffic across a wide area surrounding the country and support our allies in monitoring ocean activity. We also send experts to NATO military commands in Europe and North America, and to NATO's forces in the Baltic States, to support the Alliance's capabilities and ensure common defence interests.



 @thorgkatrin

The Arctic is becoming flash point for international interest and competition. How does Iceland balance commitments to peace and sustainability with addressing security concerns?

Iceland's national Arctic policy remains clear, underlining our steadfast commitment to maintaining peace and low tension in the Arctic. However, recent developments have significantly heightened the importance of security and defence issues in the Arctic debate.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, cooperation between Arctic states, except for Russia, has taken on a new form in the field of security and defence. Iceland has been an active participant in this and has advocated for the seven like-minded Arctic states to take the lead in policymaking and discussion on security and defence issues in the Arctic internationally, in accordance with their obligations and rights under international law. Our cooperation has promoted transparency, predictability and clear communication, which strengthen deterrence and help reduce tensions in the region.



With heightened geopolitical uncertainty, how does Iceland plan to deepen its partnerships with NATO, Nordic neighbours, and other allies like the EU?

In recent years, growing international turmoil has made it more important than ever to strengthen cooperation with the European Union, where our closest partners and key trading relationships lie. Regional defence cooperation has grown significantly in recent years, especially through NORDEFCO and JEF. This is an important complement to, and directly supports, our partnership with NATO and the United States vis-à-vis our bilateral defence agreement from 1951.

Þorgerður Katrín Gunnarsdóttir
Minister for Foreign Affairs, Iceland
Viðreisn Leader



We need a secure Europe in an insecure world

*Few imagined that war would return to Europe, yet Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has profoundly impacted the EU. This war is a reminder that peace and freedom never can be taken for granted, writes **Troels Lund Poulsen**, Chair of **Venstre**, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence of Denmark.*

Over the past decades, the EU's role as a peace project slowly faded as our focus shifted to tackling new challenges. But we must never forget that European cooperation was founded to prevent war, with nations uniting to secure lasting peace, freedom and prosperity.

More than half a century later, we are reminded of the importance of standing together. With a shared commitment to democracy and security, we must find common solutions to our common challenges.

The first step is putting Europe in the strongest position to act. Strengthening defence is essential to protecting our freedom and peace. With growing uncertainty about the US, it is clear that the era of enjoying the peace dividend is over. Now, we must stay the course - deliver more weapons to Ukraine, faster, and continue donating to Ukraine's defence industry.

What the EU does now will shape future generations, both in Ukraine and Europe. We must take greater responsibility for our shared security, both within the EU and NATO. In Denmark, negotiations continue to increase support as Ukraine's military needs evolve.

While it is essential to keep up military donations to Ukraine, this is no longer sufficient. As Venstre, we suggest two solutions: investing directly in Ukraine's defence industry and creating partnerships with candidate countries.

Investing in Ukraine's Defence Industry: Ukraine has the capacity to produce artillery and drones. We should invest in the Ukrainian defence industry – the so-called “Danish Model”. This would accelerate production, making equipment more cost-effective, easier to maintain and increase pressure on Putin. Denmark is leading EU efforts to use frozen Russian assets to fund this.

Instead of waiting for years-long EU accession processes, we should take the lead in establishing defence cooperation between the EU and candidate countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and selected Western Balkan nations. This would grant access to EU defence programs, military missions and observer status in discussions - strengthening European security while paving the way for future membership.

Troels Lund Poulsen
Deputy Prime Minister &
Minister of Defence, Denmark
Chair of Venstre

 @troelslundp

Venstre



Liberals building

As conflict and instability test Europe's resolve, liberal leaders with experience and vision are rising to the challenge in new roles within national and supranational governments, driving bold policies and diplomacy needed to safeguard our future.



MARK RUTTE

NATO Secretary General

The long-time Dutch Prime Minister has been extremely vocal on the need to secure a sustainable peace deal between Ukraine and Russia, and called on European allies to increase their defence budgets to over 3% of their national GDP.

Rutte also prioritised NATO's adaptation to hybrid warfare by launching "Baltic Sentry", a programme boosting sea and air patrols of critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea to detect and prevent Russian sabotage.

His proactive approach to regional stability was also reflected in the Western Balkans, urging Kosovo and Serbia to normalise relations.

 @SecGenNATO



Since her appointment in November 2024, Kaja Kallas established herself as a leading voice to redefine the EU's role as a confident and capable global actor.

Under her leadership, the EU introduced proposals to improve collaboration among Member States such as the ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030 initiative, aiming to mobilise defence investments for defence investments.

She has also strongly advocated for faster EU enlargement, particularly for Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkans, and increased support for democracies under threat.

 @kajakallas



KAJA KALLAS

High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

a safer Europe



MICHEÁL MARTIN

Ireland's Taoiseach

As Minister of Defence between 2022-24, Martin kickstarted Ireland's largest-ever increase in defence spending, rising from €1.1 billion to €1.5 billion by 2028. He notably modernised Irish Defence Forces and enhanced surveillance over the western marine territory with new advanced patrol vessels.

Now as Taoiseach, Martin created a new Ministerial Council on National Security with key ministers and senior officials, fulfilling a government commitment to enhance security coordination.

 @MichealMartinTD



Fianna Fáil

Strack-Zimmermann leads the European Parliament's newest fully-fledged standing committee after three years chairing the same committee in the Bundestag, where her leadership was instrumental in initiating discussions on modernising the German armed forces.

In her initial months as Chair, she led delegation visits to Kyiv to reaffirm support to Ukrainian civil society and citizens, as well as to Israel and the Palestinian territories to assess the work of the EU's two military and civilian missions.

Strack-Zimmermann urges closer collaboration between Member States to ultimately develop a common defence policy and ensure the EU can react swiftly, decisively and in unity to pressing security threats.

 @MAStrackZi

Freie Demokraten

FDP



MARIE-AGNES STRACK-ZIMMERMANN, MEP

Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Security & Defence

Liberal Ministers steering the Council of the EU



“Security is something that we need to think about every day. It’s not only about strengthening our defence industry capabilities. It’s also about internal security, about energy security and economic security.”

.Nowoczesna

 @adamSzlapka



ADAM SZŁAPKA

Minister of European Affairs – Poland

In its Presidency programme, Poland emphasised how security can have multiple facets and identified seven key dimensions to work on: external, internal, informational, economic, energy, food and health security.

Szlapka facilitated discussions on implementing effective EU border management, addressing migration challenges, improving civil protection capacities and advancing the EU enlargement process.

The Polish Presidency notably commissioned a proposal for the establishment of the European Defence Mechanism, a joint intergovernmental fund for defence-related lending and cooperation with non-EU countries such as the UK, Norway or Switzerland.

The Council of the EU is where national ministers from the 27 EU Member States adopt laws and coordinate future EU policies. Every six months, its Presidency rotates to a different Member State, which sets priorities and chairs meetings to drive the Council's work.

In 2025, our liberal Ministers of European Affairs in Poland and Denmark have been instrumental in overseeing the creation of the Presidency programme, aligning national priorities with the EU's ongoing agenda.

"As we take on the EU Council Presidency, our ambition is clear: Europe must be safe and competitive, stronger and united. Action cannot wait. Denmark is ready to lead the way to grow our economy, strengthen our security and protect the values we all share."

Venstre
X @marie_bjerre



MARIE BJERRE

Minister of European Affairs – Denmark

Ahead of the official kickoff of the Danish Presidency on 1 July, Bjerre has been proactively discussing regional security and support for Ukraine as key priorities during visits to her European counterparts and town hall meetings with the Danish electorate.

Denmark's recent history emphasises the will for deeper integration with EU mechanisms, exemplified by the landmark 2022 referendum where Danish citizens voted to abolish a long-standing EU defence opt-out and participate in more European defence and security co-operation.

Bjerre and Denmark will collectively aim to lay the groundwork for EU laws that ensure regional and global stability, a robust commitment to NATO obligations, active support for Ukraine, and a focused approach to Arctic and North Atlantic security.



Total Security:

*For **Antti Kaikkonen**, ascending to Finland's Minister of Defence in 2019 also meant ushering in a new era for Finland's security policy as part of NATO. The **Keskusta** leader reflects on his pivotal four years in government and shares what €10 billion can buy you in air force gear today.*

What was your role in Finland's successful pursuit of NATO membership?

When Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine started, we immediately convened Finland's foreign and security policy leadership. On 18 May 2022, just under three months later, Finland and Sweden simultaneously submitted their membership applications to the NATO headquarters.

During the application process, I had very close contact with Sweden and, with the rest of the leadership group, we ensured that the 30 NATO Allies supported our membership bid.

Antti Kaikkonen
Keskusta Leader &
Member of Parliament,
Finland



@anttikaikkonen



Keskusta



How important is NATO membership to promote Finnish security?

We applied for NATO membership because we wanted to increase Finland's security with NATO's collective defence and security guarantees under Article 5.

The preventive effect of Finland's defence is significantly greater as a NATO member, as it is supported by the capabilities of the entire Alliance, joint defence planning and the political weight of NATO member states.

With Finland and Sweden joining NATO, the threshold for the use of military force in the Baltic Sea region rises, which increases the stability of the region in the longer term. All Nordic countries are now NATO Allies and can jointly promote security issues important to them within the Alliance. At the moment, I consider it very important to strengthen NATO's European pillar.

Besides NATO membership, what would you consider is your most significant achievement during your time as Minister?

The single most significant decision was the replacement of the Finnish Air Force's Hornet fleet with new multi-role fighters.

The Government signed a procurement contract with the US to bring in the Lockheed Martin F-35A Lightning II as a replacement, the most expensive acquisition in the history of the Finnish Defence Forces.

Approximately €10 billion will be spent on purchasing a number that fully replaces the Hornets' performance: that is 64 F-35A multi-role fighters. In addition to the aircraft, the package included radar systems and weapons.

The F-35 programme is multinational and the aircraft has a large user community. The system is also in use in our neighbouring countries Norway and Denmark.

What Europe can learn from Finland

*The world has changed dramatically in recent years. Truths that seemed self-evident have been questioned. Until the full-scale, brutal attack on Ukraine in February 2022, Europe was asleep at the wheel, writes **Anders Adlercreutz**, Finland's Minister of Education and Chair of **SFP – Swedish People's Party**.*

SFP, the political party that I lead, had been advocating for Finnish NATO membership for years. In fact, all my predecessors since the end of the Cold War were in favour of membership. Nearly all other political parties in Finland quickly joined us in 2022 when *“Russia's mask fell off, and only the cold face of war was visible”*, as then-President of Finland **Sauli Niinistö** said.

While security guarantees are part of the EU's Treaty of Lisbon, their delivery happens through NATO. Today, it is of vital importance that every country in Europe take our collective security seriously.

In Finland, we've kept our eye on the ball even before joining NATO. Our defence concept, based on conscription and the idea of “total security” in society, has proven to be right.

Conscription-based military service is an unquestioned fact in Finland. There is a strong sense of common responsibility for defence. Our model also creates cohesion and a sense of common identity, increasingly valuable in these polarised times.


Every nation should find the approach that works best for them, as we all have different realities. But we can all learn from each other. That is why this discussion needs to be more visible, not only in the EU, but also outside of it, including in EU candidate countries.

While it may be uncomfortable, it's necessary to keep the defence and security conversation going. Finland learned its lessons a few generations back, when we were brutally attacked by the Soviet Union and fought for survival.

Today's fight in Ukraine has shown that evil cannot be appeased. It must be met with unquestionable resolve, based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We have to show that we can defend ourselves, with or without help from others, and be prepared for everything.

This is the Finnish mentality when it comes to defence planning. Today, we trust that our allies stand with us, if need be. But we are prepared for any situation – and your country should be too.

Anders Adlercreutz
Minister of Education,
Finland & SFP Leader

 @adleande

SFP  **RKP**





The EU's Industrial Autonomy: Facts and Fantasies

*The debate around Europe's industrial autonomy is heating up. Is the EU actually on the path to strategic sovereignty, or are we just chasing an illusion? **The European Liberal Forum** separates fact from fiction in a new study unravelling a new concept, the “**industrial autonomy trilemma**” – the challenge of balancing security, sustainability and economic competitiveness.*

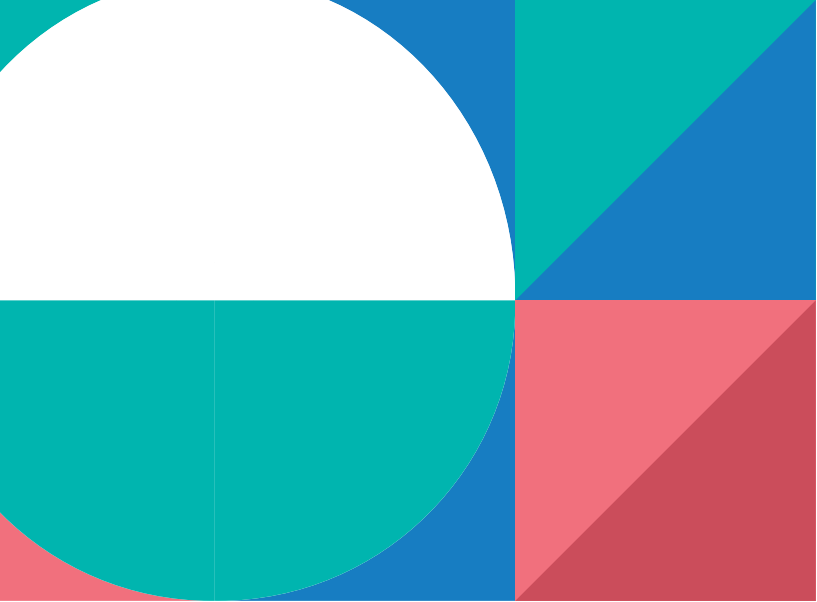
First things first, security is the EU's priority for this mandate. A pandemic and geopolitical tensions have exposed vulnerabilities – whether it's dependence on Russian energy, Chinese supply chains or American tech giants. True security means diversifying partnerships, strengthening supply chains and investing in critical industries like renewable energy without resorting to heavy-handed protectionism.

As far as sustainability is concerned, the EU wants to lead a global energy transition through the Green Deal and ambitious climate targets. But how can we make sure industrial policies align with market realities? Simple: with smarter regulation that incentivises green tech while

keeping businesses competitive in an increasingly globalised market.

Economic competitiveness is the final (and often overlooked) piece of the puzzle. Over-reliance on state aid and rigid industrial policies will only stifle innovation and make European industries less agile; instead, the EU should focus on attracting private investment, ensuring digital transformation and ensuring that its industrial strategy supports economic growth.





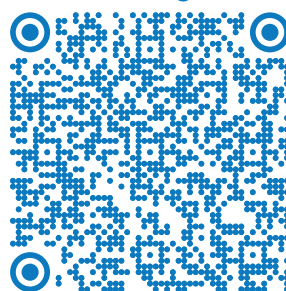
The main takeaway? The EU's industrial strategy needs to be flexible, competitive and investment-friendly. That means moving beyond excessive state intervention and ensuring that public finances actually improve innovation and productivity.

Whether it's the semiconductor race, energy security or sustainable finance, politicians and policymakers should put efficiency over political grandstanding. We need to avoid that "industrial autonomy" becomes another slogan lost among the winding corridors of the Berlaymont.

For liberals, the message is clear: industrial autonomy should empower, not isolate. ELF offers a timely reality check that real strength comes from smart, forward-thinking policies that balance security, sustainability and economic dynamism. This is the blueprint for an EU that is both self-reliant and globally engaged.



**Read the full
Study**



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From our

Europe needs to set to it

*As war reshapes Europe's priorities, we can no longer take security or economic stability for granted. **Arthur van Dijk**, King's Commissioner of North Holland, argues that the EU must urgently strengthen its infrastructure starting from the regions that power Europe's prosperity.*

For years, we thought Europe was safe. That wars were something out of history books. But the war in Ukraine has shaken us. Before then, Europe was mainly concerned with strengthening the internal market. Now, security is no longer a given and our economic position is rapidly changing.

Europe is more vulnerable than we think. The Netherlands are a transit country, an economic engine and a gateway to Europe. But are we prepared for crisis?

Our infrastructure is not ready for military mobility, our energy supply is dependent on foreign superpowers, the North Sea is full of vulnerable pipelines and data cables lacking protection. We have good, but limited, capacity in the coastguard, too little strategic coordination and not enough investment in security.

My province of Noord-Holland is a vital link in Europe's economy and security. Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam Port, Tata Steel, data centres, the hydrogen corridor and North Sea cables are all essential to our stability.

But each region has its own challenges. Roads, bridges and tunnels are not designed to carry heavy military vehicles. Our digital infrastructure is in the hands of foreign tech giants. The energy supply is a fragile puzzle of imports and unprotected installations.

We need to invest in defence, infrastructure and economic security now. Our military infrastructure must be strengthened so that roads, tunnels and bridges are fit for crisis management and warfare. The North Sea should be better guarded, with more patrols, stricter monitoring and extra security for cables and pipelines.


We must also commit to hydrogen, wind and solar energy to reduce our dependence on foreign suppliers. The Netherlands and Europe must invest in data networks to maintain control of our digital sovereignty.

Strategic cooperation is crucial. There should be no more fragmentation between government, defence and industry. Our approach needs to be coordinated and thought out, so that we are prepared for tomorrow's threats.

The Netherlands were once known as the country that fought against water. That same determination is what Europe needs against geopolitical threats. The Delta Works were a masterpiece of preparation and perseverance. Now we need to build a line of new defence against water, military threats, digital attacks and economic blackmail.

Europe's regions need to work effectively together to make this a reality. Let's make haste while we can, so we don't have to rush when we need to.

Arthur van Dijk
King's Commissioner of
North Holland

 @ArthVanDijk



Local Leaders

A steady fortress during stormy times

*It's time to rethink how we protect our people, our values and our future. **Urmas Klaas**, Mayor of the Estonian city of Tartu, explains why defending European values starts locally, and how resilience, solidarity and liberal leadership can fortify the continent in uncertain times.*

Russian aggression against Ukraine has created many new tensions between us and the enemies of freedom. It also showcased divides between free world countries that have stood together for 80 years. It is clear that Europe must stand up for itself: a secure Europe is the best guarantee for a free and democratic future.

Over the last years, security has worked its way up on the agenda of Renew Europe in the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), and I am glad to see it. Our cities and regions have an essential role to play in this. As a CoR member, I prioritised speaking about security and show how it touches each part of society.

To address European security, we must first talk about European values. In 2024, my city Tartu was a European Capital of Culture with 19 other municipalities in Southern Estonia. As our region borders Russia, we made security a major theme during events and programmes.

That year, I reminded people that European values cannot be taken for granted in speeches and presentations, both abroad and in Estonia. Democracy, human rights and the right to self-determination are values we must defend every day. This persuasive work is important, and every liberal should do it. Europe will only get stronger if Europeans want to strengthen it.

There can be many forms of crises: war, natural disasters, sabotage. In Tartu, we focus a lot on population protection. In cooperation

with apartment associations and the private sector, we have created many crisis shelters for our citizens.

Tartu has regular crisis simulation exercises for the city government and essential public services. One exercise involved our citizens: we practiced evacuation. We have even acquired generators and food supply to boost our resilience, and created crisis information centres. Just like in Tartu, municipalities across Europe can contribute to our security by focusing on protecting and helping their people.

We must not forget our friends. In 2024, Tartu and the Ukrainian city of Lviv signed a friendship treaty to help Lviv during this terrible war. For example, in March we organised a donation campaign to buy much-needed security cars for Lviv. Tartu has also participated in a CoR initiative to organise summer camps for Ukrainian children.

There are three pillars of European security: values, resilience and helping our allies. Through supporting them, we can make Europe a steady fortress during stormy times.

Urmas Klaas
Mayor of Tartu,
Estonia

@urmas.klaas



renew
europe. CoR

UKRAINE IS EUROPE'S OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD

*Europe is at a crossroads. The question is no longer whether Ukraine belongs in the EU – it's how Ukraine's experience and resilience can strengthen it. The answer is clear: Ukraine is not a burden. It is a strategic opportunity for the EU and the liberal democratic world, writes **Yevheniia Kravchuk**, ALDE Party Vice-President and Member of Parliament of Ukraine.*

Since 2014 and especially during the past three years, Ukraine has held the frontline of freedom. For us, the liberal values of freedom, dignity and human rights are not abstract notions. They are lived realities, defended at great cost.

When the war ends - and we are confident it will end with Ukraine's victory - our country must take its place as a fully-fledged contributor to Europe's collective security. We don't want to be protected forever. We want to protect Europe, together. This means joint production, joint defence planning and strategic cooperation, bringing our experience to the table.

At the leaders' summits in London and Paris in March, **President Zelenskyy** made it clear: Europe needs Ukraine just as much as Ukraine needs Europe. If we want lasting peace, we must act, and not just react, to deter future aggression.

The European Council's White Paper on Defence and the ReArm Europe initiative are crucial steps forward. We thank Member States supporting these efforts, especially those contributing to joint procurement and boosting European defence capabilities. Denmark's model of direct military investment in Ukraine shows how political will can turn into real action.

We are especially grateful to the liberal family of Europe for the unwavering support, in strengthening sanctions, promoting accountability and standing firm for our shared principles.

Sanctions remain one of the few effective tools to pressure Russia. Weakening them now would be a sign of surrender. We urge our partners to stay united and firm.

Now, Europe must reduce its dependence on external actors, even allies like the US. Ukraine stands ready to contribute not as a country in need, but as a partner ready to lead. Our defence sector needs investment and scale, and frozen Russian assets should fund it. We're also ready to share operational know-how in cyber defence, air defence and logistics.

Ukraine's experience must shape Europe's security. This is the moment to redefine what Europe stands for and ensure it is ready to defend itself – and to succeed.

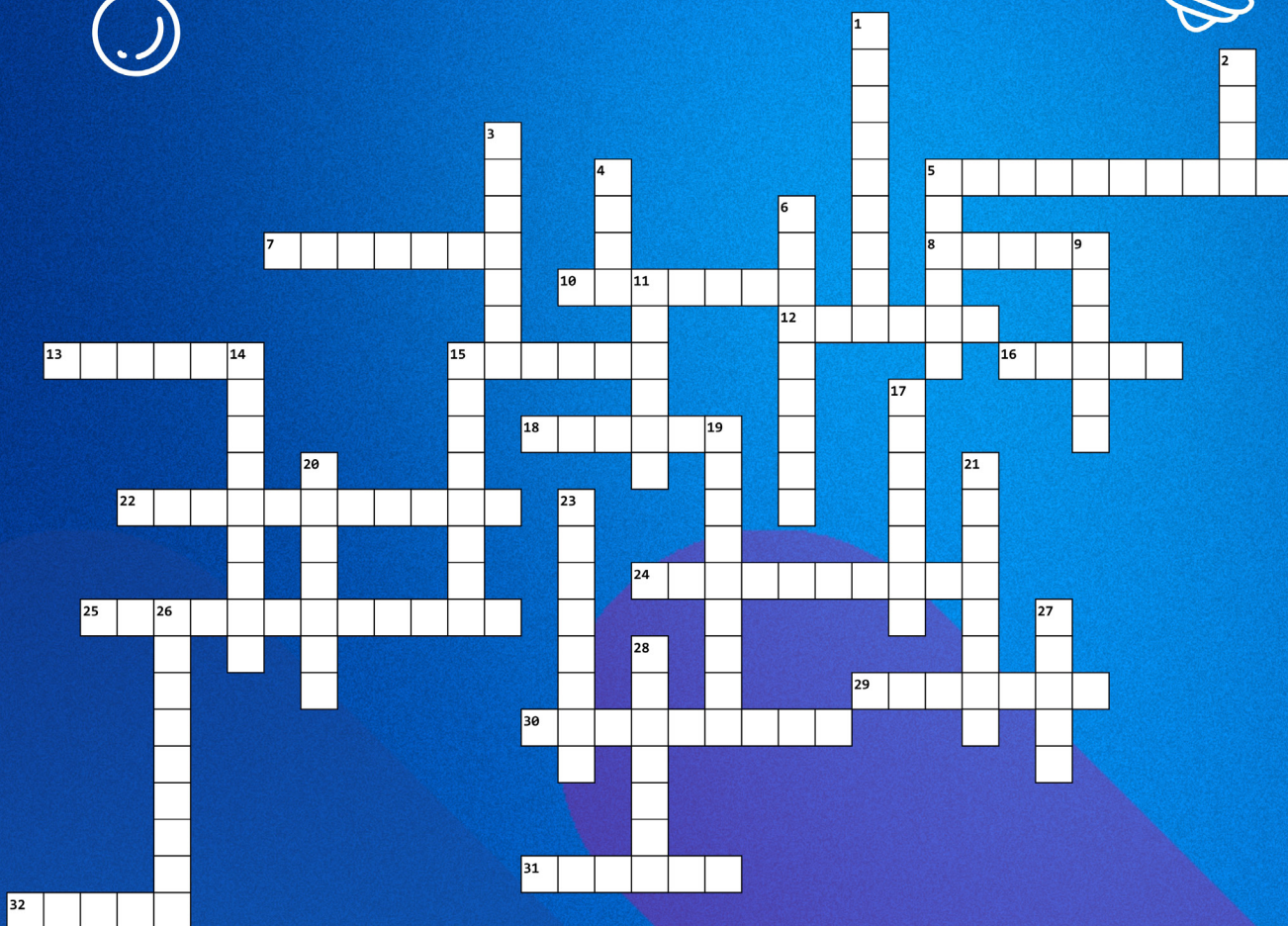
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THE BIG LIBERAL CROSSWORD

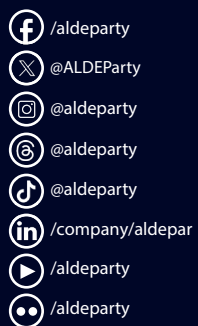


ACROSS

5. Passed after all the amendments
7. Liberal ____ : Our weekly newsletter
8. ____ Ukraini
10. The EU's newest member (2013)
12. British F1 driver
13. The EU's HRVP
15. The Mediterranean's biggest island
16. Connected to Copenhagen by a bridge
18. Spanish currency preceding the Euro
22. 2024 Eurovision winner
24. Building housing the official headquarters of the European Commission
25. Belgian festival
29. Flemish liberals
30. Micheál Martin's official title
31. Location of yearly Security Conference
32. The Q in LGBTQIA+

DOWN

1. Film starring Marlon Brando
2. Portuguese musical genre
3. Poland's most iconic dish
4. New FDP leader
5. Country where ALDE Party is 'undesirable'
6. Headquarters of the European Central Bank
9. Sang "Never Gonna Give You Up"
11. The most abundant element on Earth
14. Birthplace of European liberals
15. Romania and Bulgaria joined it fully in January
17. Your Europe, Your ____ : Our 2024 Manifesto
19. The main ingredient in Moussaka
20. Gin, vermouth and Campari
21. Westernmost French region
23. Dutch national holiday
26. A traditional Nordic festivity
27. Slovenian Prime Minister
28. Georgian capital



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