



Positions for the 2024-2029 legislative period

A discussion paper on the occasion of
the commencement of a new term
of the European Commission and the
European Parliament



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4 September 2024

Editorial



Wiebke Osigus, Minister for Federal and European Affairs and Regional Development of Lower Saxony

Stronger together. Resolving complex challenges together. Overcoming crises together – solidarity across national borders. While some are developing a European identity, others are retreating into national interests.

One thing is for sure: European values have brought us decades of peace, stability and prosperity. The European Union is a strong economic community and a reliable trading partner that sets important environmental and social standards. At the same time, the EU supports the transformation of our industry and economy, our agriculture and our service sector.

Lower Saxony derives considerable benefits from a strong EU. Cohesion policy is a key building block in this process, enabling sustainable development in all EU regions. It strengthens economic, social and territorial cohesion and helps to reduce disparities within and between regions. Support for local projects and countries managing funds in their regions promotes the resilience of rural areas, thus making Europe more tangible for the people of Lower Saxony.

Europe and Lower Saxony have a long history. Our state is an important location for international companies and it maintains close trade relations with its European neighbours. We are also the energy hub for all of Germany. Lower Saxony is actively involved in European networks and projects that promote the exchange of knowledge and innovation, and contributes to the (continuing) development of European standards.

Our diverse society contributes to the European peace project and to the promotion of European fundamental values. The European Union and Lower Saxony are reliable partners who challenge and support each other. Our common goal is to secure the economic, ecological and social foundations of peace, stability and the rule of law in Europe – for present and future generations, in urban and rural areas.

As an umbrella organisation, the Lower Saxony Ministry of Federal and European Affairs and Regional Development focuses on strategic regional development. We network Europe, the Federal Government, the regions and the municipalities. We wish to play an active part in discussions in the new legislative period of the European Commission and the European Parliament. Our government's proposals for potential changes and proposed measures are set out below.

Together we can meet the current challenges. Only through solidarity can we be strong and remain so in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wiebke Osigus', written in a cursive style.

Positions for the forthcoming
2024-2029 legislative period
of the European Commission and
European Parliament.

A discussion paper on the occasion
of the commencement of a new
term of the European Parliament

Executive Summary

The newly elected European Parliament and the new European Commission represent decisive steps in the further development of the European Union. The Lower Saxony Ministry of Federal and European Affairs and Regional Development would therefore like to take this opportunity to draw attention to changes that need to be made and propose concrete implementation steps. The key positions are listed below. These are addressed in the following chapters and supplemented by additional recommendations.

Securing the future of cohesion policy and rural areas

■ It is necessary to ensure that cohesion policy represents a policy for all regions and that all regions are provided with adequate resources to meet existing and future challenges, in particular with regard to economic, environmental and social changes.

■ We call for the maintenance of the system of shared budgetary management, which has proven its worth over many years. We reject possible attempts at EU and/or federal level to follow the example of the programming and allocation of funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility and centralise the management and control system of the Structural Funds.

■ We also call for the preservation of the regional and local approach, the partnership principle and the multi-level system as key elements of cohesion policy and cornerstones of the European idea. We reject the introduction of new centrally managed instruments (at EU or federal level) at the expense of cohesion policy.

■ Enhancing the resilience of rural areas must be clearly established in the implementation of Article 174 sentence 3 TFEU as an independent policy objective in EU policy from 2028 and equipped with adequate resources and effective instruments.

■ Discussions on the future structure and financing of the two most important policy areas affecting rural areas – the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Cohesion Policy – must be conducted jointly and subjected to a thorough assessment of the impact of policies on rural areas.

■ We advocate a coherent and well-coordinated funding framework that promotes urban-rural cooperation and strengthens relations between different types of regions in the face of major transformation challenges rather than playing them off against each other.

Boosting the EU's competitiveness

■ We need to significantly increase sustainable competitiveness.

In many industrial sectors, such as transformative and future technologies, the security and defence industry, and pharmaceutical production, the EU is indispensable as a production location.

■ In addition to improving competitiveness, it is vital that we reduce one-sided dependencies in strategic sectors (net-zero technologies, AI, quantum technologies, aerospace, biotechnology, robotics, mobility, chemicals).

■ The oft-promised simplification of procedures must finally be implemented. We expect reporting requirements to be merged according to the "Once Only Principle" in order to streamline administration. This includes implementing the targeted 25 percent reduction in reporting requirements.

■ The further development of the Banking and Capital Markets Union must preserve the tried-and-tested structures of the German banking system, with its savings banks, cooperative banks and private banks. Regionally active banks play a key role, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). They understand their circumstances and ensure their access to external financing, usually in the form of loans.

■ The introduction of the taxonomy and sustainability reporting also poses new challenges for regional banks. The implementation of EU requirements must not lead to restrictions on investments and loans for SMEs. There is an urgent need for the EU to develop a clear, concise standard format for SMEs that covers all possible requirements.

Achieving climate neutrality

■ It is vital that projects strengthen the link between climate neutrality and resilience. This is a prerequisite that goes hand in hand with employment, structural, regional, industrial, economic, services and labour market policies. In particular, the EU should think more about the link between environmental and social issues. A European Green Deal can only succeed as a social green deal with the involvement of regional and local authorities.

■ The EU must implement sustainability across the board and promote the establishment of a circular economy and the use of environmentally friendly renewable raw materials in the Member States. The key objective must continue to be a consistent reduction in overall resource consumption. In addition to industrial policies aimed at achieving climate neutrality, the focus must remain on strategies to avoid the consumption of finite primary raw materials (sand, stone, soil and water).

Creating a social Europe

■ We support Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's policy guidelines for a new action plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights that focuses on strengthening co-determination and the scope of collective bargaining agreements, as well as developing fair rules for the free movement and posting of workers. The Action Plan must also provide a framework setting out the fair use of AI in the world of work.

■ We are committed to compliance with the framework regulation on European minimum wages and call for a substantial expansion of the competences of the European Labour Authority (ELA).

■ Erasmus+ is a key instrument to support the EU as a centre of education and innovation. It opens up new perspectives for young people and trainees and boosts their skills profile. The programme must continue to receive sufficient funding to meet its needs.

■ The European Union's research framework programme Horizon Europe must be protected from further redistribution measures and additional funds must be provided to meet the high demand for the programme. Funding priorities should be closely aligned with economic policy requirements for value chains and transformation areas with a European focus (in areas such as AI, quantum technology, biotechnology, space, advanced materials, net-zero technologies).

■ We support the introduction of a single European franchise from the age of 16.

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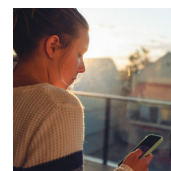
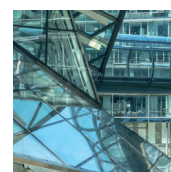
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The European Union (EU) – More than just a community of values

We in Lower Saxony are enthusiastic Europeans. Many only realise this when achievements that were thought to be secure are put at risk. We must stand together in support of shared values such as peace, security and freedom. We must also be capable of defending ourselves and demonstrate resilience in times of crisis.

We in Lower Saxony stand for a vibrant, diverse society that is supported by politics and the state. We are guided by both the principle of subsidiarity and the idea that certain goals and challenges of particular importance and significance can only be advanced at the level of the Member State or the EU, beyond the level of provincial frontiers.

The future of the EU cannot be made solely dependent on activities in individual policy areas. Further **institutional and legislative progress** is needed to ensure that it is able to act and to preserve its values.

To this end,

■ it is important to maintain peace within the EU and to adopt the role of a peacemaker in a multipolar world. This also inclu-

des a strong commitment by the EU to its partners in the Global South.

■ the EU must ensure respect for the rule of law and a diverse civil society in all EU Member States. The EU must strengthen its institutions and instruments to enforce and safeguard the principles of the rule of law throughout the Union, which includes effective sanction mechanisms for violations of the principles of democracy and the rule of law.

■ the EU should in principle be open to further enlargement, subject to both the EU and the candidate countries being equally prepared for an enlargement round.

■ the remaining unanimity rules in the Council of Ministers must be replaced by majority decisions in all policy areas.

■ the European Parliament's right of initiative should be enshrined in the next treaty change. The indirect right of initiative through the framework agreement with the European Commission should be further strengthened.

Cohesion policy

The EU's cohesion policy makes a significant contribution to strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion and to reducing regional imbalances between European regions. It has done so successfully for many years.

The cohesion policy funds are of particular importance to us: They are implemented locally in shared management, taking into account specific regional needs and in accordance with the principle of partnership. They are a key investment instrument for overcoming challenges in all regions and also offer immense potential for people to identify with the EU and to ensure visibility in all regions. Even more developed regions do not possess the financial resources required to initiate the necessary investments on their own. For the coming years, we consider the following points to be:

- It must be ensured that cohesion policy is a policy for all regions and that all regions are provided with the resources they need to address existing and future challenges, particularly with regard to economic, ecological and social changes.
- The structural funds make an important contribution to fundamentally transforming the economy to make it more climate-neutral, sustainable and digital.
- We see the main focus as supporting the ecological and digital transformation, cross-border and interregional collaboration, innovation, environmental and climate protection (ERDF), comprehensive training and, in particular, rural development and a social Europe (ESF+). The socio-environmental transformation in the Member States must be a key focus of all funding measures. The funding for the 2028-2034 funding period must at least be maintained at the current level, adjusted for inflation. This is particularly the case for rural development, ESF+, ERDF and Interreg.

■ In particular, it must be ensured that state aid rules, such as the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), the de minimis Regulation and the de minimis Regulation for services of general economic interest (SGEI), are in place in good time for the start of the funding period and with a sufficient period of notice. Within the scope of the de minimis Regulation and the SGEI de minimis Regulation, consideration should be given to the introduction of an additional de minimis ceiling below which no offsetting against the total amount of de minimis aid granted would be performed.

- The clear objective of cohesion policy to demonstrate the local impact and added value of the EU needs to be further elaborated and enhanced.
- The success of cohesion policy is reliant on the subsidiarity principle being taken into account when drawing up funding programmes and on programmes being developed in the regions.
- Regionalised strategies and local forms of participation must be enhanced in the form of streamlined funding conditions that are workable at local level.
- Regions that use integrated territorial development instruments should be given more support in order to promote the objective of a 'people's Europe'.
- Excessive demands should not be placed on regions that take up cohesion policy funding. The EU's rates of assistance should therefore be increased by at least 10 percentage points compared to the current funding period.
- The provision of national co-financing from private sources must also continue to be permitted.



A modern cohesion policy is the glue that binds a strong and united Europe together. It is the instrument that enables the regions to develop responses to the challenges of the green and social transformation that are right for them. Every region in the EU should have the opportunity to develop its full potential.

Wiebke Osigus, Minister for Federal and European Affairs and Regional Development of Lower Saxony

■ When implementing programmes and evaluating projects, it must be ensured that costs and benefits are proportionate.

The success of cohesion policy is reflected not least in the high level of acceptance of some of the elements that have been developed in recent years. That is why, in addition to improvements, we are calling for the necessary continuation of the following measures:

- the preservation of the system of shared budgetary management, which has proven its worth over many years. We reject possible attempts at EU and/or federal level to follow the example of the programming and allocation of funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility by centralising the management and control system of the Structural Funds.
- the preservation of the regional and local approach, the partnership principle and the multi-level system as key elements of cohesion policy and cornerstones of the European idea. We

reject the introduction of new centrally managed instruments (at EU or federal level) at the expense of cohesion policy.

The rise of anti-democratic views threatens social cohesion and political stability in some EU Member States. Cohesion policy, and in particular the projects that can be implemented under ESF+, can help to enhance social cohesion.

We are therefore committed to:

- giving the ESF+, which is an instrument for investing in Europe's people and a driver of skills and innovation, a prominent role in boosting Europe's resilience to crises in the future.
- focusing the ESF+ on implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and supporting Member States in the areas of employment, education and social inclusion.



Rural areas

The European Union is made up of thousands of local communities and regions. More than 80 percent of the EU's territory consists of rural areas. Around one third of the EU's total population lives in rural areas. Enhancing the resilience of rural areas across all dimensions – environmental, social, economic, digital and in the pursuit of their own interests – is a key prerequisite for the success of the required transformation processes (including energy and transport transition and the protection of biodiversity). It is a crucial element in establishing social cohesion in the Member States and to ensure a stable, democratic and pro-European society in Europe.

We therefore expect the Commission and Parliament in the next legislature to

- enhance the resilience of rural areas by implementing the requirement in Art. 174 sentence 3 TFEU that rural areas be paid particular attention, be clearly established as a stand-alone policy objective in EU policy from 2028 onwards and be addressed with adequate resources and effective instruments.
- perceive the needs and potentials of rural areas not only from the perspective of agriculture and the food industry, but also address them by means of a broad structural policy approach to ensure the provision of public services and supplies, sustainable infrastructure, a diversified economic structure and skilled employment opportunities in those rural areas.



Enhancing the resilience of rural areas across all dimensions – environmental, social, economic, digital and in the pursuit of their own interests – is a key prerequisite for the success of the necessary transformation processes.

- conduct discussions on the future structure and financing of the two most important policy areas affecting rural areas – the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Cohesion Policy – jointly and subject them to a thorough assessment of the impact of policies on rural areas. Achieving these objectives requires the establishment of overarching working structures at Commission level and in the expert committees.

- set up a coherent and well-coordinated funding framework that promotes urban-rural cooperation and strengthens relations between different types of regions in the face of major transformation challenges rather than playing them off against each other.

- put forward several options for enhancing European rural policy for discussion and consider their merits.

These range from greater autonomy and weighting of structural policy elements in the EAFRD to integrating a funding hub for the development of rural areas in the Structural Funds.

- ensure that rural development policy offers young people prospects for the future and focuses to a greater degree on their opportunities for participation.

- make sure that the CAP is geared towards resilient and sustainable agrifood systems that are fit for the future and ensure strong, liveable rural areas.



Economy, energy, trade and transformation

In recent decades, the EU has established itself as an independent and important player in the global economy. Many Member States are now aware that important processes of cooperation and competition with other regions of the world can only be advanced at EU level. At the same time, the EU is faced with the fact that it is no longer seen as the only or most important partner in other regions of the world. It also needs to shore up its own foundations and, in particular, its industrial base.

We in Lower Saxony acknowledge and support the need for action identified by the EU, taking into account the following considerations:

- We need to significantly increase sustainable competitiveness. In many industrial sectors, the EU is indispensable as a production location. These include, for example, transformation and future technologies, the security and defence industry and pharmaceutical production. In addition to increasing competitiveness, it is also important to reduce net dependencies in strategic sectors (NetZero technologies, AI, Quantum technologies, aerospace, biotechnologies, robotics, mobility, chemicals).

- We call for a resilient, pragmatic and sustainable European agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector. The key elements are to minimise the administrative burden on those working in agriculture and fisheries; enhance the position of farmers in the food supply chain – in particular, by ensuring fair incomes; and guarantee that competition is fair and rule-based – globally and in the internal market.

- We need to promote the health and pharmaceutical sectors, through an ambitious Critical Medicines Act and other measures, to address our dependencies and enhance our sovereignty, resilience and capacity for innovation and production in the EU. In the field of social policy, we also support greater European cooperation on drug safety and supply. Access to healthcare is essential to strengthen social and societal cohesion.



- We support the development of the European Health Data Space (EHDS). This has the potential to establish Europe-wide standards for the use of health data, which would sustainably enhance the efficiency of care in Europe and the innovative prowess of our part of the world.

All too often, administrative and technical specifications restrict, complicate and sometimes even prevent the implementation of desirable EU initiatives. We welcome the fact that the President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, recognised this as an important focus of her second term in office in her speech to the European Parliament on 18 July 2024. The oft-promised simplification of procedures must finally be implemented. This reflects well on the EU's ability to act.

We in Lower Saxony expect:

- the consolidation of reporting requirements in line with the "once only" principle to achieve administrative simplification, combined with the implementation of the targeted 25 percent reduction of reporting.
- the rapid development of digital tools to simplify formalities, which requires end-to-end digital documentation and verification processes. While there is no need for additional documentation requirements, there is a need to simplify the documentation and possibly the introduction of flat-rate accounting.
- a significant expansion of simplified sustainability reporting requirements for SMEs, particularly with regard to short, local and regional value chains.
- systematic involvement of the skilled trades in the development of new standards.
- a speeding up of planning and permitting procedures to achieve economic transformation goals; among other things, we call for the extension of material exclusion.
- a longer-term relaxation of state aid rules to allow state support measures to take effect, and greater consideration of the objectives of the Structural and Investment Funds in EU state aid law. This includes climate-neutral, resilient added value, good employment prospects, job security and career development

opportunities. The legislation on state aid law to be enhanced to enable Member States to pursue a proactive economic, structural and regional policy in relation to the transformation objectives.

- optimisation of the potential of IPCEIs to drive deep tech and disruptive innovation. This will require more involvement by SMEs in commerce, industry and crafts. We fully support the creation of a Joint European Forum (JEF) for IPCEIs.

- well-targeted public procurement to boost green lead markets and enhance Europe's resilience. This should include a review of the 2014 Public Procurement Directives with the aim of simplifying and streamlining them, and, in particular, to increase the emphasis they place on innovation, environmental and resilience. There also needs to be a clear and binding collective agreement.

It is not possible to predict all the developments that will occur in the coming years; other aspects will also need to be taken into account. It is therefore important to act both flexibly and dependably for the economy of the future.

In addition to the fundamental and technical points already mentioned, the following needs to be taken into account at this stage:

- A reasonably priced and reliable energy supply is a key factor in maintaining and enhancing sustainable competitiveness.
- The EU and its Member States need a future-proof energy regulatory framework to reinforce their energy independence, which must include cross-border interconnectivity of the EU's energy supply.
- Even if the reform of the electricity market design brings progress in terms of reliable pricing, it will still be necessary to set a transitional electricity price that should maintain the competitiveness of key industries and companies.
- In addition, it is crucial to continue the development of renewable energies and the hydrogen economy and to implement the agreed EU regulatory framework in dialogue with stakeholders.



We call for an ambitious, robust, open and sustainable EU trade policy that enables fair trade agreements to promote EU interests, diversification, resilience, labour and social standards and sustainability.

■ There is no doubt that a large proportion of the green hydrogen that will be required will have to be imported. We therefore need to establish partnership agreements with potential suppliers and take into account developments in their economic and energy policies.

■ If we are to maintain our industrial competitiveness in the future, additional green hydrogen production capacity and, above all, a secure and sufficient pipeline infrastructure are essential. Lower Saxony can play an important role in this regard and is committed to constructive cooperation with the EU.

■ The development of AI-based 'real-world labs' must be accompanied by targeted funding measures.

The EU stands for openness and is opposed to protectionism. This should continue to be reflected in its trade policy and serve to increase the attractiveness of the EU as a partner:

■ We call for an ambitious, robust, open and sustainable EU trade policy that enables fair trade agreements to promote the EU's interests, diversification, resilience, labour and social standards, and sustainability. To ensure a level playing field at global level, the EU should consistently use the tools available to deal effectively with unfair or abusive trade or competition practices.

■ The EU must pursue a trade policy that has transparent decision-making processes and promotes the goals of socially and ecologically sustainable development.

■ In a fragmented globalised world, fair trade partnerships are key to our future viability and to economic development in the Global South. Fair trade partnerships can enable the EU to source raw materials, while adding value and securing labour and environmental standards in our partner countries.

■ This goes hand-in-hand with the development of green diplomacy, which includes developing green future markets and promoting climate partnerships. The global commitment to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Global Biodiversity Framework must also be reflected in trade agreements.

■ In view of the intensifying trade conflicts, the Commission could, in particular, press ahead with the issue of "uniform criteria for mandatory export controls in all member states" with more determination and tackle the reform of foreign direct investment screening in the EU.





The further development of the Banking and Capital Markets Union must not weaken the tried-and-tested structures of the German banking system, with its savings banks, cooperative banks and private banks.

Finance

The European Single Market remains one of the EU's greatest achievements. Combined with the free movement of persons and the single currency, the euro, it ensures that the added value provided by the EU is immediately apparent to citizens and businesses.

To further consolidate and optimise these benefits, further measures should be promoted and framework conditions should be adhered to:

- The Banking and Capital Markets Union can facilitate access to finance for businesses, permitting companies to access funds more easily and at lower cost. The aim should therefore be to complete the Banking and Capital Markets Union in a practicable manner. Account must be taken of the key role played by regional banks, especially in the case of SMEs in trade, industry and crafts.

- SMEs need regionally active banks that understand their situation and are able to secure access to external financial re-

sources, generally in the form of loans. The further development of the Banking and Capital Markets Union must not weaken the tried-and-tested structures of the German banking system, with its savings banks, cooperative banks and private banks. This applies both to the revision of crisis management for banks and to the institutional safeguards, the functioning of which must not be jeopardised.

- The introduction of the taxonomy and sustainability reporting also poses new challenges for regional banks and must not lead to restrictions in investments and loans for SMEs. There is an urgent need for the EU to develop a clear, concise standard format for SMEs that covers all possible requirements.

- The European Investment Bank (EIB) is regarded as a key player in financing transformation technologies. Among other things, consideration should be given to providing additional funding for projects that have so far been underfunded, such as the European Hydrogen Bank.

Environment, nature and climate

In a time of multiple crises, the existential threat of climate change is in danger of being neglected. The EU has risen to the challenge in an exemplary manner, even when compared with other global powers. This must continue in the coming years in the form of an ambitious roadmap to achieve climate neutrality and resilience, to halt the loss of biodiversity and to stop the pollution of our planet during a period of crisis.

We believe that:

- it is essential to dovetail climate neutrality and resilience plans more closely with employment, structural and regional, industrial and economic, services and labour market policies. In particular, the EU should increasingly consider environmental and social issues in tandem. Measures should be subject to impact assessments, particularly with regard to vulnerable groups. A European Green Deal can only be successful if it is a social green deal.

- cities and municipalities are key actors in achieving climate neutrality and resilience. We need the EU to be a reliable partner for cities and municipalities in the ecological transition. To do this, the EU must see the many local authorities as strong partners and support them.

We bear the responsibility for future generations. It is our duty to ensure that everyone has a future worth living for and all those involved need to put their all into achieving that objective. "Achieving the one thing without neglecting the other" is more relevant than ever in this context.

Together with the EU, we want to:

- step up efforts on industrial CO₂ management, in particular in the form of a regulatory framework for CO₂ capture, transport and storage. Furthermore, a CO₂ capture and storage infrastructure must be established quickly. The EU emissions trading system must gradually integrate the removal of CO₂ from the

atmosphere. The EU needs to devise a comprehensive EU carbon management strategy to this end.

- The EU should also develop and provide funding and incentives for certification schemes.

- The successful LIFE programme for environmental and climate protection measures must be retained.

- The Nature Restoration Law must be implemented as an important contribution to preserving biodiversity and protecting nature and species.

- The EU must implement sustainability across the board and promote the establishment of a circular economy and the use of environmentally friendly renewable raw materials in the Member States. In addition to industrial policy initiatives to achieve climate neutrality, there is a need to focus on strategies that avoid using finite primary raw materials (sand, stone, soil and water).

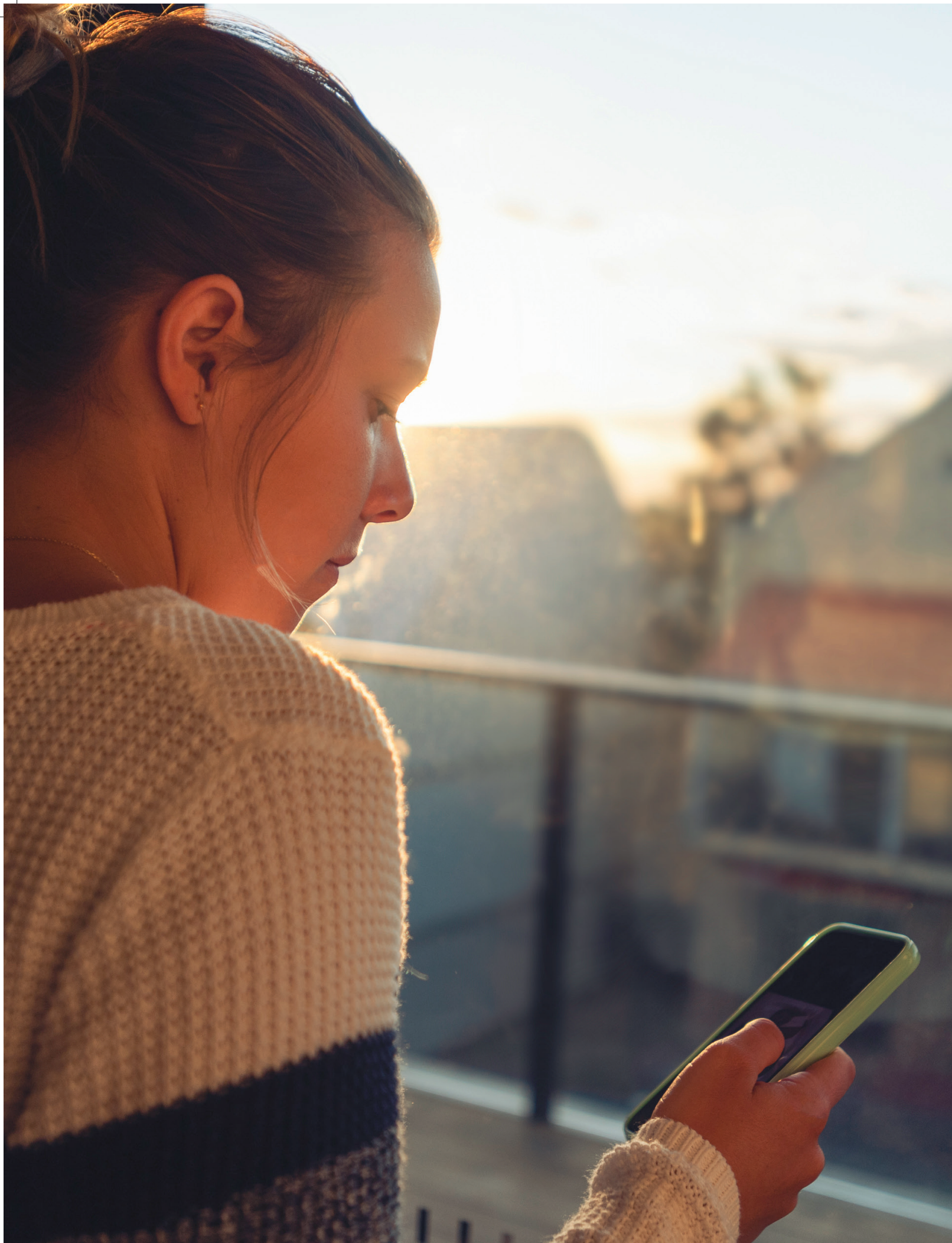
- Clear, binding European waste prevention targets for all sectors. The waste hierarchy must finally be taken seriously. The principles of prevention, reuse and genuine recycling should be observed across the board. Another aspect to be considered is promoting "renovation instead of new construction" in the development of towns, cities and municipalities.

- In addition, the important role played by municipal waste collection and recycling facilities should be supported by appropriate regulation at European level. In particular, transferring responsibility for the collection and recycling of waste containing recyclable materials to private companies should be avoided.



A European Green Deal can only be successful if it is a social green deal.







Social Affairs

We are deeply concerned by the current threats to social cohesion in many EU Member States. (Child) poverty, discrimination, loneliness and exclusion are becoming increasingly common and threaten the positive development of the community at all political levels. We want to counteract this by increasing our social commitment and strengthening **all aspects of the European Pillar of Social Rights**.

This will require

- the establishment of a new action plan to implement the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, focusing on strengthening co-determination and the scope of collective bargaining agreements, as well as developing fair rules for the free movement and posting of workers. The Action Plan must also provide a framework setting out the fair use of AI in the world of work.
- Special attention should be paid to child poverty so that it can be combatted in a targeted manner through a combination of transfer payments, education, counselling and health services (e.g. with appropriate paediatric care). The National Action Plan "New Opportunities for Children in Germany" as part of the European Council Recommendation on the European Child Guarantee offers important and appropriate starting points, particularly since these recommendations have been adopted by all EU Member States.
- a targeted reform of the rules for coordinating social security systems.
- that ecologically classifiable economic activities play a key role in collective bargaining and co-determination and are extended to include an ambitious social dimension.
- the effective monitoring of compliance with the **Framework Regulation on European minimum wages that was introduced in 2022**, and significantly extend the competences of the **European Labour Authority (ELA)**.

We want to strengthen all aspects of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

that the 80 percent collective bargaining coverage target set in the framework legislation on the European minimum wage for all Member States of the European Union is actively developed and reviewed.

We expect the EU to place the coexistence of peoples at the forefront of its actions and to work for non-discriminatory societies in its member states.

- Gender-based violence also occurs in the digital world. An ever-growing number of young people are victims of cyber violence and bullying, often with serious consequences for their mental health. The fight against cyberbullying and sexual violence must be stepped up. It should be obligatory to use real names on social networks and source checking should be introduced. The "Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, and replacing the Framework Decision" can be a model for further initiatives.
- Rape is dealt with differently in the various Member States. The principle of "yes means yes" rather than "no means no" must apply in all Member States.
- The EU must prohibit legal regulations or de facto state actions that discriminate against queer people.
- The EU should devise an action plan against religiously motivated crime and discrimination and support it with its own measures in the areas of mobility and education.
- Support services for people with disabilities must be available across the EU to ensure that they too are able to benefit from free movement.



Erasmus+ is a key instrument to support the EU as a centre of education and innovation.

Education, research, youth and culture

For many people, Europe is made tangible by their personal experiences. EU citizens are able to benefit from a wide range of opportunities to meet, engage in dialogue, learn from each other and improve together. Supporting and strengthening these activities through the EU is extremely desirable.

The Land of Lower Saxony is an independent, autonomous actor in the field of education and culture. We see the EU as the ideal promoter and partner for Europe-wide cooperation and mobility. Looking to the future, we expect:

- Erasmus+ is a key instrument to support the EU as a centre of education and innovation. It opens up new perspectives for young people and trainees and boosts their skills profile. The programme must continue to be funded to an extent that meet its needs.
- The European Union's research framework programme Horizon Europe must be protected from further redistribution measures and additional funds must be provided to meet the high demand.
- The funding of international youth encounters must be made more comprehensive and its bureaucracy simplified. This is another area in which barriers must be removed so that all young people can benefit from international experiences and encounters.
- Mobility in vocational education and training must be given a higher priority. One of the ways in which it could be accelerated is by a European strategy to increase the mobility of skilled workers.
- Political education and education about Europe, but also changes to qualification requirements resulting from the transformation of the economy, must be regularly pursued and promoted in the formal school and adult education sector as well as in the form of non-formal educational opportunities. They are a proven and effective means of promoting democratic awareness and countering disinformation. To this end, European Schools and joint democracy education projects must be provided with adequate resources. An important aspect of these opportunities is the learning of foreign languages. Multilingualism is a fundamental principle of the EU. We support the monitoring that the European Commission carries out, the most recent of which was the Eurobarometer on language learning.
- In addition to exchanging experiences, twinning facilitates mutual understanding between peoples and also provides the basis for a democratically supported process of European integration. Increased support for such mobility should be considered.
- The EU has made an important contribution to an open society and cross-border encounters through the European Capital of Culture, cultural funding and the cultural heritage label. This should be continued more vigorously than in the past, and in particular should include the digital sector.
- The EU's youth policy instruments, such as the Youth Check a and the EU Youth Dialogue, should be continuously developed as part of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027.
- We support the introduction of a single European franchise from the age of 16.



**Lower Saxony Ministry of Federal
and European Affairs and Regional
Development**

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